

# WAR OF THE UNIVERSE



# War of the Universe

DAKOTA FRANDSEN

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# Contents

1	The Suits	1
2	The Assignment	21
3	Fathers Come...	63
4	Fast Forward A Year	89
5	Outcasted By Hell	99
6	Dawn of the War	157
7	The War Has Begun	205



# Chapter 1

## The Suits

My sense of time and space grew weak. I couldn't tell how long it was until the drugs wore off and I found myself in a room. I tried standing but my wrists and ankles were bound to a cold, metal chair. My vision started out blurry but slowly cleared to find a man in a black suit. No, not the alien-looking ones that tried to kill me. The man in front of me was definitely human. I could hear him trying to speak to me, but all I could hear were distant murmurs.

"Hello Mr. Frandsen, you and I have much to discuss," he said when my hearing finally cleared.

"Where am I?" I asked.

"We are at a secret facility underground. My bosses believe that this would be the safest way to have a conversation with you considering everything you are capable of doing."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, normally I would tell you all about what we do, but based on what our sources have collected on you, you already have a pretty good idea."

I didn't have a clue what he was talking about. The drugs must have still been working their way through my system. I felt weak, like parts of me were missing.

"I see that the drugs are still lingering in your system. Don't worry, you should be back together with your counterparts very soon. The drug was designed to put roadblocks in your brain that prevent paranormal powers from emerging. Apparently, they take up most of your mental functions which are why you are acting like you were interrupted from a deep sleep," he said.

I sat up and shook my head. He was right, my Shadow and Light Hunters were no longer attached to my soul. I was weak, tired, and somewhat helpless. I still had access to some of my powers but they were activated by thought and I was simply too weak.

"How much did you give me?" I asked.

"I believe the recommended dosage to bring you in was pretty close to what is needed to knock out a small grizzly bear," he joked.

I gave him a look that said I wasn't in the mood for jokes.

"Sorry, but it is true," he said. I watched as he pulled out a chair from a nearby desk and sat about three feet away from me.

"So before we continue, can I at least ask what your name is?" I asked.



“My name is Ronald Ford. The organization I work for doesn't really have a name, but I do believe that you had called us 'The Suits?' I have heard many names tossed around by conspiracy theorists but I honestly like that one better.”

I didn't care for the friendly conversation that Ronald was trying to make because his guys tried to kill me. But I had a chance to dig into something deeper kept me from going ballistic. “So what is it that you want from me?” I asked.

“There is a war coming. A war unlike any other. An invasion that will lead to a war of worlds.”

My attention was in full. Extraterrestrials have long been rumored to visit our world, and even intervene in our wars. But a war of the worlds would be something new, something that could destroy civilizations. Many of the other races out there are considered to be friendly, so who was going to invade?

“What is going on?” I asked.

“In short, deals that were made back with a couple of the invaders in the forties and fifties have broken. Our agents have been closely monitoring bursts in electromagnetic frequencies that are only possible with high-speed space travel; essentially our radios can 'hear' when the ships slow down. So many of their scouts have made their way into the solar system as we speak, some even setting up shop on the moon.”

“Whose scouts?”

"We don't know. There are at least thirty civilizations we have made contact with the outside of our planet, with the strong belief that much more are still out there. We don't know who is fighting or even what they want. All we know is that they have been watching for a very long time."

I heard two knocks on a metal surface come from behind me. Ronald looked to where it originated and signaled with his index finger for the source to enter. I heard a metal door handle click and a door open. A woman had entered the room.

"Mr. Ford, I have the file you requested," she said.

"Excellent! Bring it here and meet our guest," he suggested. The sound of high heels walked towards him, just passing me. I managed to get a good look at her. She stood at about five and a half feet with a mosquito-like build. Her skin and hair nearly held the same shade of gray. This woman did not look healthy at all. She handed a thick file over to Ronald then turned to face me. Without missing a beat her faced dropped as if she was starstruck.

"Ms. Grey, meet Dakota Frandsen," said Ford.

"Hello, I have heard a great deal about you," she said.

"I would love to give a more appropriate greeting but as you can see my hands are tied," I replied. To show her the extent of my bindings I lifted my palms, giving a gentle wave. She nodded then left the room to continue her business. Ford held up the folder and grew a

slight grin on his face. He was giving off the vibe like a cars salesman coming for a new customer.

"I bet you are wondering what is in this file," he grinned.

"No, I already know what is it. It has information on the first job you are going to give me if I sign join your ranks."

His face dropped. A complete guess on my part must have been accurate.

"The drugs should have blocked your powers," he said.

"Maybe, but I don't need my alternate egos in order to use my abilities. Even monkey minds like yours have ways of fooling itself," I replied.

My earlier statement was nothing more than a mere guess, at times I have very little idea about the extent of my abilities. Since earlier encounters with Ford's organization almost resulted in my death I needed to portray myself as more powerful than they imagined. Even though they were government affiliated, they are still easy to influence. Perhaps in time, I would be able to run the government without anyone knowing.

Yet inside my mind, I could feel the barricades brought by the drugs fading away. My abilities had returned. My counterparts were still absent from my mind, but enough of me managed to collect itself in order to put up a fight. I clenched my fists together and channeled energy through my arms and legs. Large energy balls pushed themselves through my arms, gath-

ered in my wrists and ankles. With a quick squeeze of my fists the bindings that held me to the chair burst. Mr. Ford jumped back to avoid the shrapnel.

"Take it easy, Dakota," he shouted.

"Would you relax? The damn things itch," I told him.

"Fine," he said catching his breath, "So are you interested?"

"Yes, I am. Just tell me this, is the country's black budget real?"

"Sign up and your living expenses and further projects will get paid by it."

"Cool. Where do I sign up?"

"You pull off this case, you're in."

"Alright, show me what I have to..."

Another needle was pushed into my neck and injected more drugs into my system, silencing my words. I immediately blacked out, so it would be easier for them to ship me. I didn't know where I was or why I was going. Was it to ship me to another facility in the various underground tunnels owned by the United States government?

No, surprisingly enough. I was back at home, lying in bed. My sheets undisturbed as if I was nothing more than a note laid against them. I sat up while brushing down on my face with my right hand, just trying to ease my spinning head. My body felt like it was starved for days. The feeling only stayed for a couple minutes. My cell phone rang in the other room, grasping my attention.

I got up and walked closer to the noise, nearly bumping into everything in the way. I entered my office to find my phone ringing against the desk sitting next to my keys, wallet, and a vanilla folder. The phone displayed Shandra's picture and name. Not acknowledging the mysterious folder, I answered my phone.

"Hello?" I answered.

"Where have you been?" screamed Shandra.

"What do you mean?"

"Dakota, I have been trying to call you for the last five hours. Jessica just got back and she told us that you would check on her but we never heard a single word from you!"

I removed my phone from my ear in order to check the time. The display read, "6:30 p.m." I tried to think back to moments just before the Suits held me captive. It was around one o'clock according to the displays inside a cruiser's dashboard computer. Yet I was drugged to sleep for most of that time.

"Let's just say I was compromised," I told her.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Federal agents tried to interrogate me."

"What? Dakota, you're breaking up. Can you just come here? I really need to see you, we all need to see you."

"Alright, I'll be there in a few minutes."

"Please!"

She hung up the other end of the line. In the moments of silence just before I shut my phone the folder

on the desk caught my attention. It was the same folder Agent Ford held during our meeting. I took my hand and gently opened it to reveal its contents. On top of several photos and other documents was a note that was addressed to me.

It read, "Dakota, I never got to congratulate you on finding your friend. Police haven't found a single lead yet you took down the very guy that was responsible for it all. That being said my organization wishes to recruit you. But in order to do that we need to see you out in the field. In this folder is a typical assignment we are given by superiors. Given the circumstances of your abilities, however, we have decided to assign you something with higher risks. Everything you need to know in is this file.

"Good luck. Ford."

I had a hard time believing what was happening. I had entered the gates of Hell itself to save a friend only to be greeted by an agency that used Hell as a mask. No one knew the purpose of the Suits. My curiosity was peaked. My only choice was to join their ranks to find the answers so many before me have gotten close to. Only this time, I would have less of a chance of being executed under mysterious circumstances. But if I went on the inside, death would be my only way out.

The thought was nearly impossible to wrap my mind around. Before I could even think about what could be in the file I was reminded of the three girls that needed to see me. I slipped the note back into the file and left

it in its original position, grabbed my keys and phone, and walked downstairs. Some reason the house looked different as if I entered a new reality. Everything was where I left it but it just seemed different. As I walked out the front door the same sensations overcame me. The world looked different after seeing someone die. Even if so many were able to move on to a better place, it still felt weird. Perhaps it was nothing, but it was hard to tell. I tried to think of where she could be located, but my thoughts were halted by the presence of my car. The agents were even nice enough to fix up the car and make it appear new.

Then I realized something, Shandra didn't tell me where she was. As I got into my refurbished car I tried to think of everywhere her and Brianna could have gone. I didn't know if Brianna had moved since we broke up. The park I saw her at earlier was our old meeting place because she happened to live near it.

"Maybe she still lives there," I thought to myself.

I started my car and drove off, just trying to remember how to get to Brianna's house. At the edge of my driveway, I turned left as the path I used to walk would retrace itself before me. Even a few flashbacks decided to make themselves known in order to help me get there. Not a lot has changed other than fresher paint on the streets. About a quarter of a mile away from my place I made a turn into a large cul-de-sac with several trees. A small house with flowers growing into the woodwork around the front deck caught my

eye. It wasn't because of a lack of caring for the place. The flowers were actually an intended design that Jessica had me help with when I was still dating Brianna. I didn't see what Jessica's vision was for the place, but now I see something many people only thought was possible in fairy tales.

"Are you sure you want to go in there?" asked my Shadow Hunter as he and his light counterpart manifested in the backseat.

"Why shouldn't I go in?" I asked.

"Dude, think. Your ex-girlfriend has been hanging with your current girlfriend. Nothing good comes from it."

"At this point, I really don't care. Besides, where have you two been?"

"We couldn't find you, but we knew you were going to be fine so we have been keeping an eye on the girls," said the Light Hunter.

"Fair enough. Now let's regroup before the girls see us."

He nodded his head and shifted into a dark energy ball. My Light Hunter followed suit as they both fused themselves with my soul. I finally had a sense of completion within myself. I have been attached to my alter egos for so long if we become separated for extended, we grew weaker. I always thought that maybe it was possible to hold the strength for much longer, but the power I need would be equal to three Earth's exploding.



Once I felt my egos had settled in, my car was parked just outside the house and I got out. When I slammed the car door, the front door to the house was thrown open and something came running for me. What it was running too fast for me to recognize what, or even who, it was. A force that moved so fast it tackled me to the ground. I let out a heavy grunt as my body hit the sidewalk. The taste of strawberry shampoo scented hair entered my mouth. I spit out the hair and looked down to see who had forced me to the ground. It was Shandra sitting on my lower stomach with her arms and legs draped over my sides. I tried to speak but before any sound could escape Shandra slapped me across the face.

“What happened to you?” she asked.

“The government found out about me and took me to some weird facility,” I answered.

“Don't lie to me!”

“I am not. Check my neck, whoever took me had to drug me in order to move me anywhere.”

I turned my head to reveal where I felt the needles enter my skin. Two tiny bumps, that almost looked like mosquito bites, rested just underneath my jaw line.

“Will you be okay?” she asked with a tone of guilt.

“Yeah, it was just something to make me fall asleep,” I told her.

The next thing I knew I felt Shandra's lips against mine as her hair covered our faces. When she came up for air she whispered, “I was so worried about you,”

then proceeded to kiss me some more. A couple minutes passed before our lips separated again.

"I know. But don't worry, I will always find a way back home," I said while desperately trying to comfort her. Our lips met for one final peck before she lifted herself off of me. As I got up I noticed Brianna standing in the doorway.

"Thank you for finding her," she whispered.

"You're welcome. Is she okay?" I asked.

"Yeah, she is in her room right now."

Brianna stepped to the side of the doorway, signaling for me to enter. Shandra followed me inside. Except for dust gathered in the paint on the walls, making them appear darker, the house was unchanged since the last time I visited. Old couches with floral designs gathered around a fifty-six-inch television, a pile of dirty dishes sitting inside the kitchen sink, and even tears in the carpets stayed unscratched. It was almost like walking into my own house after being gone for days on end. Nothing was moved from its place. I found the hallway that leads to the bedrooms and searched for Jessica. The slightest of whimpers dug their way through tiny holes in the door at the farthest end of the hallway. I knocked twice and whispered, "Jessica, it's me," before I walked inside.

Inside the room I found Jessica laying on her bed with her face buried into bright pink pillows. Her room was isolated in a faint gray haze. It was hard to see anything that wasn't exposed by the hallway lights. I

wanted to find a light switch just so I could see better, but my gut told me I might as well be tying Giant Hogweed, a plant notorious for sap that burns if exposed to sunlight, around her. She already was covered in wounds, even if they were hard to see, so nonchalantly exposing her to light when all she needs is time alone would cause more harm than good. Thankfully my job is to work in the darkness. Jessica had now fallen silent in my presence.

"How are you holding up?" I asked her.

"Fine," she whispered as she laid her head on its side. There were two wet streaks on the pillows that lined up with her bloodshot eyes.

"Jess, it's okay to talk. I saw what happened."

"No, you didn't. You didn't see what was down there."

"What do you mean?"

"You didn't see them. You didn't see their faces as they died. You didn't see the pain in their eyes when that guy would start grabbing us. There was something down there that watched. When one of us couldn't take it anymore, something was there to take us away. Something evil."

"Were they the ones growling when I killed the guy that did this to you?"

She paused for a moment and adjusted her head so she could look at me while lying down.

"How did you hear them?" she asked.

"Things have changed since the last time we saw each other. I see things that other people can't see."

"Is that how you found me?"

I nodded my head, "yes". She deserved to know the truth about the person that broke her free.

"I get these visions. Sometimes they show me the future, sometimes they help me look into the past. I have a hard time controlling it, but when they happen it is always something important," I told her. She finally sat up and slid herself across her bed to sit next to me.

"But why me?"

I set my left hand in between us and left it hovering just a couple inches above the sheets. "Grab my hand and we will see," I said. I don't know what compelled me to ask Jessica to do this, it almost seemed impulsive. It happened just about every time I had a "super-human" episode. It sounds cliché I know, but it was the only title I could think of at the time.

Jessica grabbed my hand and squeezed. A vision colored in blue lights materialized in my eyes. I could see the outlines five people gathered in front of a large building that appeared to be built from scrap metal and tiny lights of several bright colors strung across it. More details became clearer, revealing the identities of the five people. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. In a war-torn area standing in the middle of a small village built from the remains of machines was Jessica, Olivia, and Shandra gathered around me enjoying Christmas decorations. Another woman was hiding behind us that

was hard to see. The adults appeared to have aged a little more than a decade and Olivia looked about the age of eight. I was actually glimpsing into the distant future. Olivia was holding a drawing with the words, "Merry Christmas 2026" across the top of the paper. The vision quickly disappeared before I could note any other details.

Jessica noticed something was off about me. I couldn't tell if she saw the vision. "What is it Dakota?" she asked.

I turned to her and said, "It looks like you might be needed in a few years."

She took my answer quite well, at least that is how it seemed. All she did was wrap her arms around me and whispered the words, "Thank you for everything." I wrapped my arms around her for a couple minutes before her sister interrupted the scene.

"Hey, you're finally up," she nearly cheered. Jessica and I broke our bondage so she could greet her sister. We looked towards the doorway to find Brianna and Shandra peeking inside.

"Thanks to Dakota," said Jessica.

"Yeah, he can work miracles if you let him," Shandra joked.

Through the rest of the night, the four of us simply spent the time catching up on lost times until I was asked to leave by Jessica and Brianna's parents. They thanked me for helping their daughter but knowing that we had a history they worried things would turn,

“risky” as they put it. I understood their position, but honestly, I couldn't help but grin. I couldn't help but smile at the suggestion they were implying. But I respected their wishes and left. But before I left I was asked by Shandra to speak outside.

The storm clouds looked as if they were ready to spill. A gentle wind grew around us. We stood in the dead center of the yard. My car and the front door were equidistant. I looked into Shandra's eyes to find she was concerned about something.

“Dakota, is everything alright?” she asked.

“It's fine,” I answered.

“Are you sure? When I asked for your help you seemed kinda ticked.”

“It's nothing, Shandra.”

She didn't believe me. I could see her fists clenching together. Her heart began to race with a killer's strength. “Dakota, don't you lie to me!” she screamed. A burst of thunder sounded off in the sky. I jumped a little when I realized what was happening. Perhaps her former Valkyrie allies felt her unsettled heart.

“Shandra, I am not lying!” I yelled.

“Yes, you are! Tell me what is wrong!”

“Fine, you want to know what is wrong?”

“I'm waiting!”

I tried biting my lips, but it was no use. She was wanting to know what was going on, so I told her. “You asking me to find Jessica,” I whispered.

“What the hell are you talking about?”

"The only reason I even came because I knew that it was Brianna you were talking about. If it was anybody else I wouldn't have come."

"Why? If someone needed our help you wouldn't step in? What the hell Dakota?!"

"Shandra, these things aren't always accurate and could get someone killed! Somebody already died when I got there!"

"So what?! When someone comes to us for help we help them!"

"I know but not like this! It would be like making a next of kin call without a body, that is something I cannot do!"

"What do you mean, psychics tell people about dead relatives on T.V all the time!"

"Really, that is your argument? Those morons get things wrong all the time and everything they see is often easy to find with a web search! When they say somebody who was reported is missing they are making assumptions off of nothing and tell worried families their loved one is dead!"

"Don't you talk to me like that! You know what I mean!"

"Yeah I do but I don't have time for this. I have to be somewhere."

"Fine, go! I don't care!"

"Fine!"

Shandra and I stormed away from each other. In my chest I could feel something starting to rip, a bond

slowly withering away. I shouldn't have snapped but she was leaving me no choice. I didn't let my family dictate how I ran things, so I wasn't going to let someone who I have known for a few months decide it either. I know I said I made her a partner and all but there were limits. People don't realize psychics aren't perfect, hell several "psychics" don't realize psychics aren't perfect. They try to become supernatural marksmen and give predictions that are on the money and are willing to risk innocent lives just to make a point. It is the reason I never labeled myself as a psychic, just someone who is "gifted."

I had to acknowledge that there was going to be times where I messed up, especially with that particular argument with Shandra, but I tried my best to avoid hurting anyone. If I did, I would always try to fix things in time. So that is why I avoid having to use my abilities to look for missing people. Don't get me wrong, if I felt that my intervention could lead to finding them, I will always try to look into it on my own accord. I know I should have tried to explain all of this to Shandra, but she was getting irritated to the point the skies threatened to help her take me down. We needed our space. Thankfully there was a job laying in a vanilla folder on top of my desk.

I started up my car and drove home. In the rear view mirror, I watched as Shandra collapsed into Jessica and Brianna. They came outside when they heard when things almost turn into a brawl. I saw the tears



running down her face from miles away because they materialized on the face of a little girl who appeared in the shotgun seat.

The urge to stop the car and turn around grew inside me, but I just continued driving forward. Perhaps it was pride that made me do it, so I could send a message. Because of my kindness, people become quick to assume that I would fight with them no matter what they did. So often times my services became taken for granted. But thanks to the diversity of my talents, I had a way to be galaxies away before tensions settled if I felt the need. You don't have to tell me, I know this is pretty harsh and what I did in the next few hours was probably the most arrogant thing I could have done. To this day I still feel guilty about that fight.

When I got home I went straight into my office and checked the time on my phone. The display told me it was eight forty-nine pm. I set down my phone near my computer monitor and took a moment to clear my head. My face felt hot with tiny trickles emerging from my eyes trying to calm the blaze. I couldn't believe what just happened, Shandra and I just had our first big fight. I tried to brush off my face with my hands so I could look at the contents of the file without ruining them with my crying.

Inside there were seven photographs of a local man. According to profile left in the folder, this man was responsible for hacking into several military databases and was using the information to construct state-of-

the-art explosives for use on a nearby nuclear plant and at several undisclosed locations. The target didn't have any known connections to terrorist groups but was still considered dangerous. His name was Clemente Ferri. He stood at five feet nine inches and weighed about two hundred pounds. A photocopy of his driver's license and weapons permit showed he lived in an apartment building on South Aspen Street in apartment 4D. A small white note fell out of the folder and hit the floor. I reached down to pick it up. It was a note from Mr. Ford.

*"Mr. Frandsen, I hope you feel this target is worthy enough of your skill set. Ferri is planning on several acts of terrorism including setting off explosives in a few nuclear research facilities. If he is successful there will be several lives lost and projects involving nuclear energy will render the entire Western United States uninhabitable for several thousand years. Our intelligence operatives have managed to discover he plans on releasing the first explosive this Wednesday. Kill him before he gets the chance and you will have access to things beyond your imagination. How you go about doing this is up to you, and our agents will be watching. If we find out anything else the information will be planted into your email account.*

*"Best of luck, Mr. Ford"*

## Chapter 2

# The Assignment

“I hope you feel this target is worthy enough of your skill set? What the hell is that supposed to mean?” I asked out loud.

It is my first job, I wasn't going to be too picky about any assignments they would put me on. Well, as long as they weren't jobs just for the low guy on the totem pole. Knowing who I was working with, I knew that they wouldn't toss someone of my ability out for a coffee run. Then again, this was the US government I was dealing with.

The government was given blame for various incidents, some even involving terrorist threats, so I was a bit confused about why they would want me to take out the guy. If the target was planning on a nuclear attack, maybe something was in the blast zone that was needed to be preserved. Off the top of my head, I could only think of the hundreds of military bases that would be affected by fallout, if the blast was powerful enough.

But in order to cause damage for the entire western United States, one would need the combination of a fucking huge blast radius, weather conditions, and fall-out regions. Maybe this could be achieved by hitting several nuclear facilities, but the circumstances would render an operation like that almost impossible to achieve without the attackers falling victim to radiation poisoning. There was something else going on, I just knew it but I didn't have anything to support my claim.

Perhaps the best bet was to eliminate the target as ordered. If Ferri followed a textbook example then chances were he was a loner. Nobody but his mother would miss him. But unlike an inexperienced teacher who dared to dabble in criminal sciences after watching too many crime shows on television, I realized that the world does not function as textbooks make it seem. Everything is much more complex. As I continued to look through the files it became clearer what was happening. Clemente Ferri had no known affiliation with terrorist organizations, his only criminal record included a couple speeding tickets, and absolutely nothing else that would make him a suspect of crimes like this. Digging a little further I found a report from a private investigator that may be the inspiration for these crimes. It detailed an incident involving Ferri and his ex-wife after he discovered she was having an affair, which eventually lead to their divorce. Their only child was placed in shared custody, rotating between parents

each week, and attended online schooling so he wouldn't miss anything.

Based on the documents the child was a little older than me and his name was John. From what I could tell John was currently with his mother, thus allowing for a greater chance of no witnesses. Being that the outside conditions seemed ideal, I took a couple hours in order to get some ideas on Ferri's day to day habits in order to look for a moment of opportunity.

The best moment was to look for a time when their guard is down. Ferri was known to frequent a bar that was located just a couple blocks from his house, sometimes bringing home some drunk brunette for the night. This would be my time to attack, with the hope that the brunette was too drunk to remember anything. But the paperwork was never enough to understand a person. I needed to find out his exact patterns. What time did he go have a drink? How long did he stay and how much did he drink? Did he meet up with any buddies that could verify when he was killed? How many liked to kick back and enjoy a game of poker at his place after work? Getting to the point, I needed to find out how long it would take for people to realize he was gone. Obviously, the following Saturday, when his child would make the transition from mother to father was going to be a dead giveaway.

Once I was finished looking through the file I got onto my computer and opened up a web browser to check my emails. Before I could see if the Suits had

provided any more intelligence on Ferri, my phone went off, also displaying a photo of the caller. Shandra was covered in shades of pink and red as I snuck a kiss right before the photo booth from the mall took our picture during one of our days out together. After a few rings, there was silence, but the phone didn't signal a missed call. Instead, a different tone sounded off, screaming a voicemail was left. Perhaps in its way to tell me to stop being an asshole, my computer decided to freeze. I tried to get it running, but even the mouse decided to be stubborn and not work at all until I listened to Shandra's message.

Out of frustration, the message my electronics obviously tried to send became clearer. In a final push of resistance, I watched as my hand became rubber as it grew and shrank in order to decide whether or not to respond to the situation. In a final push, my fingers wrapped themselves around the phone and unlocked it. I dialed the combination for voicemail followed by my security code and waited for the automated voice on the other end to finally play the message.

"You have one unheard message," read off the phone. A loud beep nearly pierced my ear drums before the whispered of a drowned voice just barely earning back its breath faded in. Shandra had barely gathered enough strength to make this call, but the splashes of tears from angels could still be heard.

"Dakota, I am so sorry about the fight. I get it. I get that it is hard for you to see the pain that others go

through, but I need you to understand what this means to me. I know you saw what happened to my friend after the guy that took Jessica found her. I didn't want you to end up like her," she cried.

My chest froze after hearing Shandra's voice. A part of her story that I, even with supernatural aid, could not see until I got that phone call was now playing in front and all around me. I saw everything through her eyes.

In the background I could Jessica and Brianna's voices trying to encourage Shandra to reveal everything. The sound of Shandra choking on her tears filled the other end of the line. For every regret that spread through my body, her tears might as well been corrosive acid. I felt my insides crumble away. On the recording, I heard Shandra take a long breath to seal away her crying as if she was trying to say something else. "Just don't leave me, please. I can't lose you now. I just can't. Please, if not for me than for Olivia. Just please I need to see you, soon. I'm so sorry for everything just please come see me," she cried. As if her crying wasn't enough there was a second voice that followed, perhaps the one that hurt the worst.

"Daddy, please talk to mommy," cried my little time-traveler. In that moment I hated my actions, but in a weak attempt to lighten the mood a thought came into my head. I knew then that Shandra and Olivia would team up against me in the future. There was no need for a prophetic stone in order to see it.

I set my phone aside and tried getting my computer to function again. My computer might as well have taken a nude trip through the Arctic Circle in order to explain its behavior. "Perhaps I need to do more for her," I whispered to myself. I watched my computer come back to life as I said those words and giggled the words, "You little shit," as everything I wanted it to do finally happened.

I guess one has to come to the conclusion that the other people involved in these situations must be important when technology even steps in to make sure the right thing is done. Not the typical "The I Fucked-up Flowers and Chocolates" package, that would be too expected. I wanted to do something most guys wouldn't think of even trying, a way to seal away my image into her mind forever.

My mind began to circle through various images in order to piece together some idea of what to do. The only two items the frequented my thoughts revolved around roses and poetry, but something started to form when an image of a little girl in a princess costume came forward. Perhaps it was to tell me I needed to try a sort of "royal" approach, maybe treat it as if I was to approach a royal. A scroll of some sort would suffice, but not just any rolled up piece of paper, in place of the rods would be two roses.

A piece of paper decorated with a flower border was tucked underneath my monitor. I didn't know how it got there but was perfect for what I wanted to do. I



couldn't just grab a random surface and fill it with random couplets in order to swing an angry woman my way, everything needed to look professional. I reached for a pen as I closed my eyes so my mind would be sealed away for it all, for it was my heart who needed to speak. My hand started moving on its own accord, piecing together a symphony to melt away any thorns around the heart of a rose. When they opened, I read exactly what it said so my mind would know what was coming.

“Shandra,

“How is it that an angel from heaven is able to shred the very threads of my heart with a single tear or leave footprints in the meadows covered with cherry blossoms from a dream? Please do not cry over our times apart for if there ever comes a journey I must take, and you are not able to join me, it will only serve as my reason for coming back so I could be in your arms. No matter the distance I must travel, no matter the trials I must endure, no matter the foes I must face I will always find a way to be at your side. The future has already come to greet us in the form of our own beautiful angel. When she is paired with you together your eyes sing a sweet serenade that stops the world. You illuminate the darkest of worlds and the very privilege to see the lights that dance within your heart is the very last sight I wish to see if ever I should once again meet Death and finally leave. But regardless of what happens; be it if I am surfing the Heavens, battle the

flames of Hell, or meet the day where I rejoin the fabrics of the cosmos I will always find a way to be around when you need me. I am forever yours, my Cherry Blossom.

“Dakota”

Gentlemen, that is how you write to a woman.

My letter needed to be something that held a simple message repeated for centuries, in all languages, yet spoken as something new without any aid for its conception. Originality in romantic words has become so disintegrated over time, making a simple hand-written letter an alien concept. Yet perhaps if more people actually took the time to actually write, and I mean actually write, a letter confessing the true colors of the human soul without the acidic mediums brought forth by technology and unintelligent use of popular phrases and texting acronyms then maybe the concept of true love wouldn't be labeled as fantasy. Perhaps it is my interpretation of marriage based on my grandparents that lead me to such conclusions.

You see growing up, it was the success of my grandparent's marriage that I molded my ideas of how love should be. I watched as every other attempted try at a relationship end with nothing but troubles for everyone, and to get to the point I didn't want that. Shandra knew this, but because of her abusive ex-boyfriend, she would worry instinctively begin to worry. Once I had a chance to deliver the note, it would be the first step in reversing those toxic thoughts.

As I logged into my email, I started to wonder how I would balance yet another job on top of everything else I was working on. Trying to hold together a relationship was hard enough, but having to meet the demands of a shadow organization on top of it was going to complicate things to the limits. I couldn't help but play every action movie featuring somebody who lived a double-life that made a turn for the worse, just to picture how it would come crashing down. But before the crash, there was always the one fucked up job seen by unwanted eyes. Knowing the simple fact members of the Suits were responsible for kidnappings and assassinations, my imagination took off with various ideas on how my time with the suits would turn wrong. But of course, with the thoughts of a bloody discovery comes to the demons created by the actions. Judging by the smell of burning flesh that sprouted around me, a demon was coming to visit me. A voice that seemingly originated from thin air whispered, "I know, this is probably a bad time, but you shouldn't worry too much about the girl. Even though she is worried about you, she will be with you for a long time."

I hadn't heard that voice for a long time. He was attached to my family for four centuries until the war and was the one responsible for my Shadow and Light hunters.

"Abraxon, it has been a while," I said. Abraxon materialized behind me. He was a very tall man with a slender build, covered by a long black clothing that ap-

peared to triple his size. During his mortal life, he must have dealt with great troubles that stretched his skin in his old age. Paired with nearly rotten teeth that looked like the blades of a shark's jaw, he was the literal personification of nightmares

"Yes, it has. So tell me why is it that you are working with the space monkeys? Those guys dig into shit that can get you killed."

"These guys must be fucked up if a demon like yourself is warning me about them."

"Well, I'd guess you could say I know more about the insides of a bad person than most people," he giggled.

Something about Abraxon's laughter triggered my Shadow Hunter. I felt a dark black ooze fill my veins as he took over. "You are one of the lucky ones to tear them apart," I growled.

"There is the you I was hoping to speak with! You will be much more useful than your feather head friend," Abraxon joked.

My Light Hunter sensed the surge in dark energy and decided to manifest in the room so he could monitor the situation. "What is going on here?" he asked.

"I need to talk with you both about the assignment the Suits gave you. Mostly about the sorry sap, Ferri."

"What about him?"

"The Suits don't give a shit about the rest of the country, the people are considered nothing more than collateral damage."

"Then why the fuck do they want him dead?"

"He found some information on a massive weapon your country's military is developing. I don't know all the details but it supposedly has enough of a kick to kill everyone in Asia in a single blast."

"A nuke?" I asked.

"No, much worse. Nuclear power is nothing more than an infant compared to this," said Abraxon.

"Something like a Brahmastra?"

The Brahmastra is said to be a nuclear device depicted within an ancient Hindu text known as the Mahabharata. It was a weapon developed by Brahma, the destroyer of worlds. The evidence is rumored to exist in various parts of the middle east that show very high levels of radiation. Many theories, ranging from a meteor to volcanic activity, are tossed around to smooth over the rough patches in the timeline of events historians have in place. But many theories also go against the popular ideas, stating that there isn't any solid evidence to fully support the claims.

"Bigger. If enough juice is poured into the device, the entire planet could be thrown out of orbit. The energy source is hidden somewhere in an air force laboratory here in Idaho," said Abraxon.

"Figures that it would be somewhere around here. Do any of your guys have any more specific details on where to find the source?" I asked.

"It's in the ground. That is all I can tell you."

Before I could say anymore, Abraxon faded away as did my counterparts, leaving me alone to further this

endeavor. I leaned back in my chair to mull around all of the theories. Much like how little kids start to ramble on the typical he said she said routine in order to excuse a fight, I was receiving the “this is why, no this is why” justification for high profile deaths. Everyone involved starts screaming their own reasons for why they committed a crime, basing their wording from memories distorted by trauma. I had to somehow find a way to sort the information.

I typed in my login information for my email account and waited for the screen to load. Maybe a few more details would be included in an email sent from someone with the Suits. If anyone was going to send the email, it would have to be Ms. Grey. As I thought of Ford's assistant I began to notice something about her that didn't occur me during our first encounter. Her eyes were awfully large, almost bug-like, yet they were capable of expressing emotion like a typical human. The only possible explanation I came to was from some old abductions stories where children were created from harvested DNA. The abductors were sometimes nice enough to show the abductees the kid that resulted from the procedures. Most of the time, when the operation was done by the extraterrestrials, the hybridization conceived girls. So it wasn't much of a stretch to assume Ms. Grey was one of the hybrids.

An email sat in my inbox that wasn't marked by a sender and didn't have anything in the subject line. There wasn't even a time-stamp to tell me when the

message was sent. I opened the email to reveal its contents, hoping it wasn't a cleverly timed computer virus. Inside was a virtual map with a green line tracing a rather squirrely route through town to Ferri's house. Just underneath the map was a message that read, "I believe you will find this route beneficial. You have until 10 o'clock tonight to get to the wrap-up the package. Feel free to take the time to tie up some stems while on the way."

I kinda figured that there would be some cryptic language in the message, but going from typical "package delivered" cliché to tying up stems was rather unusual. Were the Suits trying to hint at something? By the sound of the last sentence they were giving me some free time before I had to kill Ferri, but why? I looked closer at the map just to see if I could find any detail that could lead to what the Suits were referencing.

Halfway through the route, a separate green line was traced through a dead end. The map was too small of a scale in order to make out any details, so I looked up a similar one online. I found an aerial view that closely resembled the map I was given. It showed a similar area that was shown in my email, but the online map lacked some of the newer streets. Parts of the route was slightly distorted due to the lack of roads, but a majority of it was the same. Finding the dead that stuck out like a sore thumb, I zoomed in to get a better idea of the location and finally realized the meaning behind the added message. The Suits, at least Ford, was trying

to help with my relationship. "Tie up some stems," was a clever way of saying I should patch things up with Shandra.

"Wait. Were they spying on me when I gave her that nickname?" I asked myself.

I knew the Suits were keeping tabs on me. But remembering a nickname I gave to a girlfriend was almost a method of intimidation. If they ever wanted to catch my attention or get me riled up for a job, they could simply bring it up in the middle of a threat. They obviously knew I have a sensitive spot towards guys beating on girls. It would easily be a way for someone to catch my attention. But still, it was a rather clever way of telling me I should work on my relationships while working.

I looked at the clock on my computer to check the time. It was close to eight. The sun was just barely visible as it tucked itself underneath the horizon. My time was running out to pull off an impossibly convenient job. Except for the one missing detail that bothered me, the weapon. If I just used my hands I would leave too much evidence. Using a gun would simply make too much noise. It is hard to mask a fight without having some sort of evidence literally painting every moment.

Coming to the realization that the traffic was nearly non-existent at this time of day, I grabbed my keys, cell phone, the note for Shandra and made my way outside. The street was empty for miles in both directions, except for a couple birds resting near the sidewalks. The



streetlights along each side of the road and controlling each intersection seemed to grow brighter with each moment just to help make sure every night owl persona in town got to where they needed to be. As I stepped outside my front door, my foot knocked a small white box off of my top landing. I didn't hear any mail delivery guys knock on my door in the hours before, so it was freaking me out a bit trying to guess what the heck could be inside.

I jumped off of my landing and picked up the box. Just to get an idea of what was inside, I held the box up to my ear and gave it a gentle shake. A heavy object was inside, judging by the loud thuds against the cardboard, accompanied by some paper. Thinking that it had something to do with Ferri, I waited until I got into the car before I opened it. As I sat in the front seat and nearly slammed the door shut, I took one of my keys and cut the tape between the folds of the box. I took a deep breath before opening up the box, knowing the moment it was opened I could not turn back. Once I found an old forty-five pistol, partially covered with a folded piece of paper, it was already too late for me to back out. I reached for the paper and gently unfolded it to reveal the contents.

“Make sure to keep your cell phone in the cup holder. Its signal will shift all the traffic lights to green just long enough for you to pass. Dispose of the weapon in the dumpster four blocks from the scene and keep it as clean as possible. There will be an any-

mous tip forwarded to the local police station at exactly 10:05 pm. That should give you about half an hour to get yourself cleaned up and into the bed before the sirens start singing. I hope you are a heavy sleeper.

“Ms. Grey”

More poetic language, I should have expected that much. It was typical coded language, but it was awfully direct. To be honest, I didn't mind that the notes were straight to the point, it eliminated the chances of my head boiling over from trying to solve too complex of a puzzle. Ferri was going to die, that much I did know. But how was still up to me, the gun could simply be a tool of interrogation. So no one would get suspicious of my actions, I place the note back into the box and stuck it in my middle console as a message from an unknown number on my phone appeared. I took my phone out of my pocket and opened it up to reveal the contents. Somebody sent me the exact map that appeared in my email.

I took a few minutes to study every twist, every turn, every bump and every fork on the map. I knew the way from my house over to where the girls were staying fairly well because of some of the nearby businesses, but I wasn't familiar with Ferri's area.

Once I was sure of the directions, I locked my phone and set it inside the cup holder as ordered. I gripped the transmission stick and started driving. The street easy to maneuver. Even if I had to pull some stupid maneuvers, it was highly unlikely a police officer would

spot me. From seven till ten at the latest officers are typically making sure their families are in bed with locked doors and windows before the crazies came out at eleven.

The traffic lights acted as predicted. I figured that if something wasn't planted in my phone to cause electrical interference than there must be a series of hackers watching my cell phone signal and switching the colors of the traffic lights as I made my way through town. I couldn't help but notice the looks on people's faces in the couple cars I happened to pass. Perhaps their emotions were hampered by lack of sleep, but it was rather amusing watching their faces drop in shock. It was like showing a small child a magic trick for the first time.

Within minutes I had an opportunity to use one of my own magic tricks. I had my note for Shandra tucked away in my pants pocket, ready for delivery. I pulled it out and read it once again in my mind so I could remember the exact wording for future reference. Just in case she brought it in the future, maybe for a dinner date or even in a sweet moment for a heart to heart conversation, I wanted to be able to recite it all word for word. Because of what I wrote I could not help but think in the third-person perspective after reading it. Inside I could not help but notice two entirely different identities, one that was a clever romantic and the other categorized itself as a babbling idiot that screwed up. Personally, I think of myself as the clever romantic idiot. I know I am going to make some mistakes, and as

long as I had a good idea of what I did, I can usually think of something to patch up the scars.

I took a moment to watch the house the girls were in just to get an idea of what was happening on the inside. All of the shades had been closed shut, only letting light from television screens dance through the windows. Through all of the flickering of various colors, I noticed three shadows towards the bottom. My bet was that Jessica and Brianna decided that an evening of romantic comedies and ice cream would be good for Shandra. Which was good for me, they would all be in a decent enough mood to let me do what I needed to do.

I tried to keep the noise down as I left my car with the note in hand. When it came to my "secret letters," I always tried to keep things quiet just to build some suspense. If actions like these were predicted the meaning of it deteriorates. All relationships need some surprise in order to keep things fresh. Maybe Jessica and Brianna were expecting something to come up since they witnessed the first time I tried using the notes, but oh well. I just hoped they didn't tell Shandra any of the specifics, an advantage of ending things on good terms. Inside the house I noticed two of the shadows begin to stir as one of the neighbor's dog started to yap away after peeking its head out the window. I tried to get a look at the dog but all I could find was a tiny brown dot bouncing around in a nearby window.

"Must be a Chihuahua puppy," I whispered to myself.

I walked up to the front door of the house, trying my best to be stealthy so the house wouldn't give me away. I raised my fist up against the door to give it a gentle knock, but the thought of Brianna's parents coming to the door quickly caused my arm to holster itself. I knew if I was in their position, having some guy pop up just as it was getting dark would make me very nervous, especially after getting someone back from a dangerous situation. But worries wouldn't be as intense if she simply popped her head outside to stare at starlight like she usually did when she needed to think about something.

I propped my forehead against the door and closed my eyes. I focused my mind on the image of the girls lying in front of the television, visualizing that a part of me was sneaking up to Jessica's ear so I could perhaps influence her thoughts. Thankfully my control over my astral abilities had become near perfect at the time.

"Come outside for a moment, take a breather," I whispered.

I watched as she jumped to the sound of my voice. She definitely heard me but was perhaps a little frightened to come outside. I figured she may have thought that a new attacker had come to finish the job.

"It's okay. No one will hurt you," I reminded her.

The idea seemed to finally plant itself in Jessica's mind. In her mind, the idea to sneak outside was all on her. As long as I was the one who happened to pass by as she stepped out, she was going to be perfectly safe.

My astral form retracted to my mind as Jessica walked toward the door. As I heard the doorknob jiggle, I took two steps back so I wouldn't appear as intimidating. The door opened and Jessica stepped out so focused in thought, she was blind to my presence before I said something.

"Hey Jess," I whispered.

She jumped at the sound of my voice but quickly calmed herself once she realized my identity. "Dakota! You nearly scared me to death! What's up?" she loudly whispered while trying to keep herself from screaming.

"Sorry," I giggled, "How's Shandra?"

"She is doing okay. She was upset but, after I let her in on your secret, she calmed down a bit."

"Which secret are we talking?"

"That you always make sure to fix your mistakes."

"I see."

I revealed the letter I prepared for Shandra. Once it was out in the open, Jessica's face changed. She was expecting the note.

"The infamous love letters of Dakota Frandsen are back," she whispered.

"They never left really. They were just waiting for the right heart to come around."

I handed over the note to Jessica. As the tips of her fingers graced my palm, I sensed that she was wanting to say something. "I will make sure she gets this," she whispered.

"Thank you," I whispered. As she started to turn away and walk back into the house I rested my hand on her shoulder and whispered, "Jess."

She quickly turned and wrapped her arms around my sides. "Thank you, for everything," she cried.

"You're welcome," I said trying to console her.

I felt her tears rip through my shirt and gently grace my skin as if they were trying to embrace me as well. "You know, I was always hoped that I would find someone like you," she whispered.

"You will find somebody. Even if I have to smack around a few of them to help you get to that point," I joked.

"I will be sure to keep that in mind."

She turned around and walked back into the house with a smile on her face and the note in her hand. Before she shut the door completely, she gave a gentle wave goodbye. I waved back before I walked back to my car. As my hand began to reach the handle of my car door, I heard a loud squeal of excitement come from the inside of the house. Not a squeal of anger or fear, but excitement. The love letter was the perfect cure for our fight because she was in the right state of mind. Her reaction showed that she truly cared. Knowing this gave me comfort as I got in my car and continued driving towards my target.

While on the drive, my Light Hunter manifested in the shotgun seat. I really couldn't tell why he was there

and came alone. He looked concerned about something. "Are you going to be alright?" he asked.

"Yeah, why?"

"Because you need to kill Ferri tonight and having Shandra on your mind could compromise everything."

"I thought you were supposed to be the one that prevents me from killing people."

"Lately you have been ignorant of my presence. I was completely against you killing the man who took Jessica and I was trying to keep you from fighting with Shandra."

"I didn't even know that you were around to see that."

"What are you talking about? I am always around. I could be in Tokyo and still be near you."

"I know. It's just that when you two decide to show up I can normally sense it."

"Humans tend to only sense what they want to, even if they don't realize it."

"Right, so you are going to try to talk me out of killing Ferri?"

"No. I was actually coming to let you know about something that may influence what is going on."

Because my Light Hunter was bound to my soul I could immediately sense the news he was about to share wasn't going to be comforting. "What is it?" I asked, secretly hoping my ideas were wrong.

"There have been several disappearances lately within the other realms. I was asked to visit the higher



realms in order to investigate the cause. The chambers up there are putting the blame on demonic agents but nothing is being heard from the other side. Shadow was also called to check in on the lower realms but I haven't sensed him for a few hours," he said.

"You mean..." I said.

"Yes. Angels have been disappearing."

A loud bang jumped into the back seat. Light Hunter and I looked back to find our Shadow accomplice battered and out of breath. He was covered with fresh wounds on every visible part of his body.

"What the hell happened to you?" I asked.

"Hell is under attack. They are trying to put the blame on the bird brains from above but nobody has seen anything. I think it was an inside job," he answered.

"That could explain it. But Hell is always trying to bite itself in the ass. Heaven has agents pulling a disappearing act as well. Even though we can see everything, we didn't even see them leave or any signs an attack took place," replied my Light Hunter.

"Then how the fuck can you explain what is going on?"

"I don't know what is going on but fighting about it won't help," I shouted

They both looked towards each other as feuding brothers would after a fight. Even though both of my hunters were crucial to the other one's survival, they always fought as if they were sworn enemies. But hon-

estly, it was nothing more than sibling rivalry because of how connected they both were. Regardless of what was going on, I had to get them focused on the matter at hand.

"Can we focus on Ferri?" I asked.

"Sure. What is the plan?" asked Shadow.

"First, we need to see if the place has any security cameras pointing towards it that could give us away. If there are any cameras one of you needs to put them on a blind loop, so once the investigation continues they won't be able to catch my face," I ordered, "While I am inside whichever one of you is available needs to keep all of the noises from the house quiet so we don't wake up anybody."

"Considering that it is a residential neighborhood, it is likely we wouldn't have to deal with any cameras. Maybe a couple toddlers disguised as men with cell phones sticking their noses in places they shouldn't," growled Shadow Hunter.

"Agreed. If the first reaction to a deadly incident is grabbing the nearest camera, then there are some serious issues in society as it stands," added Light Hunter.

"You don't have to tell me twice. We are on our way to kill someone who will only make a much larger issue for everyone," I said.

"That is what we came to talk to you about. Ferri has no clue about the power source being monitored by the Suits," said both of the Hunters.

I slammed on the breaks as I made the last turn on the map. Thankfully my car was the only one on the road, otherwise, the bright red glow from my taillights would have signaled a nasty crash. I couldn't help but feel angry at the possibility I was lied to by Ford. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"The poor bastard has cancer. He got the condition after working a few of the nuclear facilities he is targeting," answered Shadow Hunter.

"So what is making him a target?"

"He got in trouble for screwing up a few of their machines while he was still a rookie but nothing else. But rumor says he saw something else completely at one of the sites he worked and is threatening to expose it."

"A weapon?"

"Sort of. A nuclear-powered device armed with technologies way beyond the time."

"Lemme guess... In the process of this discovery, there was an accident and he was exposed to heavy amounts of radiation."

"Leading to his belief that society is only going to die because of technology rather than improve it."

"Technically he ain't wrong. Technology has moved faster than nature can comprehend so there are going to be nasty effects."

"It is going to get even nastier if we don't keep moving," added my Light Hunter.

I pressed my foot on the gas pedal and hurried to my destination. My senses started to dull in between the

gazes of individual street lamps. The rest of my senses, which normally heightened in times like these, had also withered away to their normal status. I couldn't bring myself to become the heartless monster needed so I wouldn't feel any regrets over the death. The issue of cancer hit close to home because of my grandfather's condition. He too was affected with cancer after getting into some nasty materials at an old warehouse he worked at. The only difference was that my grandfather was exposed to the materials before any regulations were around to prevent illness. Perhaps this was why I decided to find a calm assassination method when I arrived at the target's house.

The map had me park right outside his house. It was rather odd unless they were hoping I would have access to a quick get away once everything was said and done.

Speaking of safety precautions, a thought occurred to me to help keep myself from being noticed by a nosy neighbor. If there was a chance anyone would sneak out, there was going to be some markers left out in the open. As I grabbed the gun and got out of my car, I scanned the ground to find any traces of cigarettes. Smokers always were the messy types, and not very sneaky, so if any butts were lying around it would be likely one would want to sneak outside for a quick smoke. I also checked for indents in the ground that looked like they could have come from a telescope tripod. The night was clear enough for stargazers to check out the heavens.

As I walked closer to the targeted house, I was comforted by a potential lack of any witnesses. I started to jot down a few things I noticed about the house. The paint on the outside was old and started to fade. A couple windows had large pressure cracks, making them seem fragile to the lightest touch. A metal box was mounted right next to the front door with white characters spelling out, "Clemente Ferri" just below his address. I took just a few more steps to find myself at the doorway. My large body nearly matched the dimensions of a door frame, making myself seem a bit larger. The overall house seemed smaller once I was up against it.

As I raised my arm to knock against the door, I started to feel a tingling sensation in the back of my neck. I used my other arm to check where I felt it originate, the tingling quickly evolved into an electric shock. Every part of me felt as if lightning was ready to shoot out of my body and create a storm more destructive than a volcanic eruption. My body grew numb and pale as the shocks continued. In just a matter of moments, an astral projection of myself shot out of my body and lingered just above my head. I was no longer in control of my physical self. Something crawled inside my body and took over. By the whiteness of my skin, I should have been dead.

I made the projection of myself move in front of my face so I could look into my eyes. The quickest way to tell if someone was being compromised by other enti-

ties was to look into their eyes. Something about the way the eyes adjusted made them appear as if they were more animal than human. As the view of my face became clearer, the truth became foggier than ever. There wasn't a subtle change to show an invading presence, instead of "something different" my eyes became completely black. My usual pretty blue eyes were engulfed by two pitch black balls sitting inside my eye sockets. The skin on my arms painted farmer's tan red were seemingly made of plastic that was whiter than a brand new porcelain doll. Whatever was inside my body was definitely not human or animal, it was some sort of monster wearing my skin and body. Somehow I became a Black Eyed Kid.

Black Eyed Kids are mysterious children with pitch black eyes and artificial looking skin. Allegedly, they try to enter people's homes in order to call home or get a drink. It may sound innocent but the appearance and the simple fact that their voices sounded mature and accentless usually frighten any witnesses to the point they immediately run off. Nobody could tell what they were or where they came from or even why. Nobody even attempted to offer up a theory, other than Black Eyed Kids were actually demons impersonating children. Then again, hardly anybody outside of a position of power realized that corruption has lead to many disturbing projects outside of public knowledge. I should have guessed that something like this would happen,

knowing the organization that sent me on this trip had access to powers from beyond the stars.

I tried doing everything I could think of in order to insert my astral self back into my body. I tried to meditate while envisioning myself taking back my body with no success. I tried screaming every anti-demon transcription I could think of in an attempt to perform an exorcism on myself. I even tried ramming into my own head to break through whatever barriers were present and yet still no action. I couldn't tell how or why, but I was locked out of my own body.

Just behind my invaded body, two energy balls manifested in mid-air at my chest level. The outlines of two, nearly identical entities were drawn into reality by electric bolts that would emerge from the manifestations. My Light and Shadow Hunters had emerged to help with killing Ferri but were unaware of the other forces compromising the job.

"Are you ready for this?" asked my Shadow Hunter.

I tried my best to answer him, but for some reason, he couldn't hear me. Even though he was a part of me, he was acting like a completely separate individual. He should have been able to hear the cries of my astral self. My Light Hunter was even acting as if he was clueless to what was going on.

"Dakota, are you alright?" asked my Light Hunter

Both Hunters reached out to my shoulders to catch my attention, unaware of any potential danger. As their fingers graced the fabric of my jacket, bolts of white

lightning shot into both of them. The energy caused both of them to change just like I did. But, instead of their respected auras of light and darkness, their appearance was perfect mirror images of what I had become. Set aside the feelings of shock and fear, I couldn't help but feel a sense of revelation. Black Eyed Kids, as well as the Suits, had a habit of appearing in threes, the question was how they got there. I had some ideas to point towards answers, but there was no way to tell under the pressure I was under.

"Dude, what is happening?" asked a familiar voice.

I turned to find astral projections of both my Shadow and Light Hunters. "Our bodies have been compromised. I don't know how I don't know why. But I do know it is about to get nasty," I shouted.

Right on cue, the first BEK raised his leg and slammed it through the front door. The other two followed suit by sending their fists through chunks of the door that remained. All three stopped for a breath before proceeding to rip the door apart and entering. The neighborhood dogs growled and howled at the noise. The interior lights of every house on the street lit up like flames on gas trails. People opened their front windows and doors to investigate the ruckus. I looked around to see people reaching for their phones and calling the police. The hit was going to be revealed and my happy ass was going to be plastered all over the media as a brutal killer. I had just cleared the air with Shandra, I didn't need this. I didn't need for her to think the only



reason I made any attempt to patch things up with her so she would become the lover always denying every accusation targeted towards her significant other.

"What should we do?" asked my Light Hunter.

"There is nothing we can do, at least not like this," grunted my Shadow Hunter.

Two more loud crashes from inside the house drew our attention. The noise sounded almost like glass smashing against someone's skull. "We're in the jaws of the beast comrades, might as well make it puke," I shouted.

I told a truth that was even more correct than I realized at the time. The Suits had just pulled us into a nasty mess, our only options were to see it through, or find a way to sabotage it all. There wasn't much we could do while in the form we were in, but we could still watch over everything. Maybe we could have noticed a way out or some tiny flicker of time where the invaders in our body lost control, just so we could plan something to counter what was happening. As people started to run to the scene, nearly tearing down their own doors and windows in the process, myself and the other astral travelers made our way inside the building. What we saw in there would have filled most minds with nightmares unlike any other.

"Why are you doing this to me?" screamed an older man.

The shouting came from behind us. The way the sound registered made us feel as if someone was being

tortured. My astral counterparts started to wander in different directions so we could find the source of troubles. The Hunters left to piece together our escape by checking out the situation all around the outside of the house while I looked for the poor sap getting killed.

"Somebody please help me!" shouted the voice.

I knew I was getting closer to whatever was happening. The sound of the voice was very close, at least within ten feet of my location. I found a short hallway towards the back of the house, that probably lead to the bedroom. Two large thuds against the wall suggested that it was where I needed to be. Some shadows danced on the wall just opposite of an open doorway. I felt almost drawn to the struggle as if it was a night-time delicacy made just for me. As I approached the doorway muffled grunts started to become louder. As I rounded the corner and into the room, I quickly found out why. The three Black Eyed Kids were attacking my target.

"Somebody please help me!" Ferri screamed.

"Shut up," growled the BEKs in unison.

Two of the BEKs had held up Ferri by his frail, bone-thin arms, while the third held a large kitchen knife, covered in blood, to his neck. They had been cutting deep into his skin, but from where I stood, I couldn't see where the lacerations were made.

"Where is the device?" asked one of them.

"I don't know!" screamed Clemente.

"You are lying to us," said the same entity.

The one that held the knife placed it just underneath Clemente's left ear and quickly flicked his wrist, causing one long cut that stretched to closest tip of his mouth. The separated flesh took a moment before dropping as the blood quickly began to pour. I couldn't help but turn away. I know I came here to kill him, but he didn't deserve torture. In his way, he was trying to save millions of lives from dealing with the hardships of cancer, he wasn't like the man who took Jessica. I wanted to jump in and help Clemente, but couldn't because of the form I was in.

"What are they doing to him?" asked my Shadow Hunter.

Both hunters had joined me in viewing the gruesome spectacle. Both even shared the same feelings towards the matter as I did, we wanted to help the tortured soul.

"Ain't it obvious?" asked my Light Hunter, "They are killing him!"

The BEK doppelganger with the knife stopped and turned to face us. We thought that we couldn't be seen by them, but we were quick to learn that we were wrong. "Now that is an idea," he giggled.

"How did he hear us?" I asked.

The answer to my question quickly became irrelevant as the nine-millimeter pistol, given to me for the job, was drawn and fired. Eight shots were fired, tearing into Clemente's body where ever they flew. Anger started to build inside me, driving me to lunge toward

the attackers. Somehow, I was able to grab onto one of the doppelgangers and threw him through the window. My body started to grow and shift into a solid form as the energy inside me created sparks. I didn't know what I was becoming, but I knew I finally had control.

"What the hell?" shouted Shadow Hunter.

"Get pissed. We are going to take these fuckers out," I said.

The Hunters took aim at the remaining two attackers and mimicked my actions, causing the same results to appear. All three of us were beings of lightning, with only slight difference in the color of the sparks dancing around us to tell us apart. Light Hunter shot out white lightning. Shadow Hunter released red lightning. I unleashed blue lightning.

All three of the BEK invaders stood up and stared at what we had become, startled by the fact someone was able to fight them. The outside crowd froze in their places. In their eyes, gods were about to go to war. This was already blown out of proportions, might as well end it with a bang. The leader of the BEKs held up the pistol and fired two shots before the gun clicked at the third attempt. Two tiny streaks of silver jetted past my ears, making the sound of air being ripped around the bullets echo in my ears.

"Missed me," I taunted.

All three started to growl like the hounds of Hell. Or perhaps a better description would be the heads of Cerberus, the dog of Hades. The way they charged

at us, nearly replicated a pack of hungry dogs tripping over themselves to grab a nibble of a tossed out steak. Driven by a hunger for dominance and power both the BEKs and the newly formed Lightning Trinity, comprised of myself and my hunters, went to battle. The crowd that tried to watch as a home in their neighbor fled as the sparks from our bodies struck the gas tanks in the cars our bodies were stuck against. Shrapnel and fires become our swords and shield as all six of us quickly mastered every fighting move that manifested in our minds. For every attack sprung forward by the Lightning Trinity, the Black Eyed Kids had an immediate counter. For every attempt by the Black Eyed Kids to finally end the battle, the Lightning Trinity had a method to fight longer.

I do not know why we kept fighting, we were all on the same frequencies and knew what the others were thinking. Yet, while our every movement shattered everything that came in contact, an animal-like instinct drove our fists further into the bodies of our enemies. Yet our enemies were nothing more than shadow copies of us. We could fight, we could bite, we could spit and slice, nothing mattered at all. We were one and the same. As the fighting began to settle and we all made one last final charge, a bright light emerged from our bodies. Six flares shot outward in random directions, burning holes straight through anything that stood in their way. A few minutes passed before the flares faded out and the light dimmed away, revealing a

single body... me. I was finally back into my own body, with only the essence of my Hunters tied to my soul. As I moved my body, the tingling sensation started up again, but would only start when a part of my body was moving. In some ways, it felt that my body was trying to use every nerve available in order to reject a foreign invader. Maybe that is what the Black Eyed Kids are, a form of temporary mutation caused by a virus.

I looked around me to find that the damage caused by the battle wasn't any form of hallucination. It was all very real. The street was filled with pieces glass, metal, and blood from those who stood too close to the fight. Some of the bystanders had to hold together their legs to keep from bleeding out. Flashes of red and blue scanned the entire scene with clicks and snaps emerging from their source. I heard the murmurs of radios and pissed off grunts coming from behind me. Something about the merger of six entities temporally caused some hearing loss and I was barely able to understand what was happening in my surroundings. I turned to face the police lights, just to see how screwed I was. At least a dozen SWAT members, three sheriffs, five sergeants, nine deputies and six detectives from at least four different jurisdictions had guns pointed right at me, with fingers on the trigger. They were pissed and ready to put me down like a rabid dog.

"Dakota, remove your jacket and any weapons you have on you and put your hands over your head," shouted a familiar voice.

I tried to focus my eyes in order to make out the individual faces in the police crowd getting ready to attack me. It was Jerry, aiming an assault rifle, that was trying to order me.

"We can work this out, just do as I say and this will all end here," he shouted.

I slowly raised my arms just to show I wasn't going to stir up more trouble. I didn't want to fight. I didn't want to blast through the blockade. I didn't want to cause any more problems. A man had died at my hand, even if something else had controlled my hand. It is impossible to plead insanity in Idaho courts, which would be the first spot most attorneys would go to if they got the chance. I was backed into a corner by hungry blue gators, but one's jaw was too sore to open. Jerry was offering a way out without having to get eaten by police policies.

"That is good, now remove any weapons you have on you," encouraged Jerry.

I reached my right hand over spots on my body I felt any unusual bulges. I brushed my hand over the spots I remembered placing my gun, just to find it inside my jacket pocket. While reaching inside, every muscle of every officer nearby was tensing up, oblivious as to whether or not I was going to attack. I wrapped two fingers around the handle and pulled out the weapon. My jacket tried to secure my hand in place as if it knew what was going to happen in the next few moments. In frustration, I jerked my hand out from my jacket,

only to be greeted with a sharp hypodermic needle trying to dig its way through my chest. My hands quickly fell numb, causing the pistol to slip from my grip and tumble down the road. My head grew dizzy as I looked down to find a tranquilizer dart lodged in my sternum, quickly injecting chemicals into my bloodstream.

"Okay, you guys are still pissed at me," I weakly joked before collapsing.

I felt moments of pure stillness before regaining consciousness. I couldn't feel the air rushing past my skin. I couldn't hear the sounds of footsteps on the street, or my body landing on it. I could barely even feel my pulse as it slowly faded away. The chemicals in the dart could have easily killed me if it weren't for a shot of adrenaline quickly surging through my arteries thanks to another needle, this time in my arm.

My vision was blurred and my hearing was muffled, but I knew that my body had been moved just how the sounded seemed to bounce from every wall. For some reason, as the sounds became clearer, an image in my mind drew up the conclusion that I was tied down in a room made of glass. Footsteps and voices that hit the right decibels, would cause vibrations similar to a bird flying into a window.

"Good to see that you are awake," whispered a familiar nearby voice.

My vision was still blurry, making the owner of the voice seem like nothing but a blob of different shades of gray. I looked around the room to see if I could make



out any more details. Straight across from me stood two figures. My eyes started to clear up enough to help me make out details of my surroundings. The two men were Ford and Jerry standing next to each other with arms folded. The voice near me was Ms. Grey with a pen and notepad in hand. A needle was set on a clear table with tiny wheels at the base.

"Thank you, Sasha, please stick around and take notes. I have a feeling this will be interesting," said Ford.

"Yes sir," said Ms. Grey.

"What is going on?" I asked.

Three chairs rose from the ground near the chair I was braced in. Ronald, Jerry, and Ms. Grey each took a spot. The conversation that was approaching was going to be lengthy.

"Why don't you tell us?" suggested Jerry.

"I am guessing this has something to do with the fight from earlier?"

"Bingo!"

"From what I can tell, the mutation took over and kill the target, but somehow three lightning like humanoids manifested out of thin air and started to fight with the mutants. I find that very interesting. How did that happen?" asked Ford.

"I don't know, to be honest. I am a bit out of it from the injection. Besides what the hell is it with you guys and needles? I am going to end up a fucking junkie in a matter of days!" I said.

"It is how we control our subjects. You are one of our more dangerous subjects. Help us with a few issues with the coming conflict then we will dial down the drugs."

"No! No more drugs or I walk."

I tried to muster up the strength to break through the bracelets securing my body. But as my blood started to push through my veins, my powers failed to manifest. However, my senses started to grow back, allowing me to finally feel the brace that held down my head.

"If only you could," Jerry said.

I paused for a moment when the thought of the officer, who slipped my assistance with criminal justice under the rug, was standing in a government facility.

"What the hell are you doing here Jerry?" I asked.

"You passed initiation, son. It is time you are finally let in on a few secrets that have been running your life these past few years."

"Past few years? What do you mean?"

"We have been keeping an eye on you ever since your incident when you were four. When all of the sudden, after you were killed in a very selfish way to end a custody dispute, you came back and tried to kill the person that hurt you. I remember that was my very first case."

"Well, I am glad that I could be of some service. So, I am guessing that means that because of the freaky things involved, you got in bed with the Suits."

"Pretty much. My sister was recruited as well."

"So is that how you two pushed me through the system?"

"Well yes and no. The Suits have some of the best computer hackers in the world at their disposal. With them at work, files involving you are hardly ever noticed and are quickly tucked away."

"Alright, you two, we don't have enough time for questions," interrupted Mr. Ford.

"Just wait a minute, one more question and it's for you Ford," I shouted.

Ford looked at me with surprise. Nobody had ever spoken to him in the tone, then again, nobody had enough moxie to do so.

"What is it Dakota?" he asked.

"Why is it that you are giving schedules that work in time from Shandra?"

Ford curled his lips inward while contemplating how to answer my question. He gave a gentle nod, crinkling the neck of his shirt and jacket.

"Could you please unlock him, Ms. Grey?" he whispered.

"Yes sir," she said.

Ms. Grey leaped from her seat to fulfill her orders. There were a series of buttons on the side of the chair she focused on. They must have been to adjust the braces to various prisoners. Once they loosened just enough to let my hands slip through, I sat forward and took a moment to observe my surroundings again. I

happen to notice that Jerry had gears nearly grinding themselves dull inside his skull while observing Ford's behavior.

"What's up?" I mouthed to him.

Jerry shrugged his shoulders. He was just about as curious about Ford intentions as I was. Ms. Grey, however, didn't feel any curiosity about the matter. Maybe she already knew the answers. Ford had walked a few paces away while plotting an appropriate response.

"Since we are going to be seeing more of each other, I guess I could share the details about our mutual connections," he stated.

"Mutual connections," I whispered to myself.

Nearly a millions thoughts started rushing through my mind, each coming up with a different answer to the question on everyone's mind. What were the "mutual connections?"

Ford turned to face his ever curious audience in the room and let out a heavy sigh before delivering the news.

"I am Shandra's biological father."

## Chapter 3

# Fathers Come...

“Wait... you're Shandra's father?” I asked.

“That does explain a lot,” said Jerry.

Ford just stood there, quieter than the whispers of ghosts. He obviously had much more to say but was waiting for the right questions to be asked.

“But that doesn't explain how you knew about me, or anything else for that matter,” I said.

Ford sat back in his chair and took a deep breath. Jerry even sat back to listen in on the story. To be honest, I felt like I should be passing around a big bucket of popcorn as Ford told the story because of the way the information would play itself in my mind. I noticed that Ms. Grey had settled herself as well. It was always hard to read her body language because of their robotic nature.

“I guess, I should begin,” Ford suggested.

“Please do,” Jerry said, “Cause now that I think about you have been shady ever since we met.”

"I guess I am going my job correctly then."

"So start singing Ford. If we are going to be working together we need to know all the details before anything else moves forward," I nearly shouted.

"I know, I know. Unfortunately, Dakota, you may not like how begins," he said.

"How?"

"Iraq, almost seven years ago. I was deployed with your father and the son of a bitch Shandra's mom has been seeing. No offense, but everybody in our unit wanted to empty a clip into both of them."

"None was taken. So I am guessing they were good buddies?"

"Too close, they bragged about everything they did to their poor girls at home. Your father happened to ramble on about your incident when you were four and the strange circumstances that surrounded it."

"And that is how you found me?" interrupted Jerry.

"Yes, but let me finish before you force me ahead of myself," said Ford.

I simply kept quiet because my mind trying to plot where the story could lead. Something about Ford's tone suggested that a tale of desperation and regret was going to be revealed within the next few moments. All I did know, is that Jerry happened to be a rookie when he responded to my incident.

"When I was overseas, I was responsible for monitoring reports of mysterious activities. At first, it seemed like it was to watch out for possible stealth maneuvers

from the enemy. However, there were occasions when something rather unusual did emerge, as they did with a lot of major wars throughout history. Most of the time we would brush it off as a civilian aircraft or a bird carrying around a piece of shrapnel,” Ford said just before a long pause.

The look in his eyes quickly became blank, much like a projector screen just before the show. I swore that I could see images quickly flickering in his eyes during the moments of silence that followed, images that weren't reflections of the room. Ford was reliving the moments he was trying to retell in the exact detail he remembered it happened. I tried to dig into his mind to see the images for myself, only managing to see quickly shifting blurs and hear the whispers of gunshots. Before I could receive any more information, Ford blacked out. My mind quickly turned off the feed I managed to intercept images from Ford's mind before I could get any more details. Ford swallowed in a flash of fear like he was going to confess about drug use to a family member, before attempting to continue with the story. He continued to stay silent before Ms. Grey spoke up.

“Mr. Ford? Are you alright?” she asked.

“Yeah I'm fine,” he said, “I got wind of a crash about twenty clicks from my post. Nobody knew exactly what it was but the general belief was that it was a faulty satellite. The orders eventually came in from headquarters to retrieve the satellite and have the tech guys collect any data that was on the system's hard dri-

ves. It seemed like a typical operation, but one thing that didn't sit right was that HQ wasn't sure of exact coordinates and they suggested we utilize protocols for radioactive materials in order to track it."

"Well, certain metals do become heavily charged if they are exposed to the intense heat of crashing through the atmosphere," I suggested.

"You're right. That was actually my first thought when the orders came through, but something about how it all unfolded just didn't sit right. I wasn't the only one who became curious about what was happening, others that rode in the Humvee I was in. Your father and Downs, Shandra's step-father, seemed awfully excited about the news. Maybe they were science fictions fanatics, I don't know. But what happened when we arrived on the scene would change everything for all of us."

More images flickered in Ford's eyes. What he saw defied any existing definition of the natural order of the world he knew. He wanted to stop talking altogether.

"Ron, keep going man," encouraged Jerry.

Jerry was with the Navy Reserve, and received all of the training but was never deployed. He once told me that his older brother going into the Navy that inspired his decision to follow suit. But once his wife revealed she finally became pregnant with their first-born, he chose to go with the reserve so he could be within a three-hour drive in the event of complications. In some



ways, this helped him understand Ford's position in all of this.

"We found the object, and it must have hit hard because it caused a crater about thirty feet deep. Pieces of it were scattered everywhere. We tried everything we could to collect everything but a wind storm was kicking up and was literally trying to bury us. I somehow managed to grab on to a piece of it, but something was very wrong. The material was metallic but it could be crumpled up like paper. Then like some sort of... foam, it would quickly shift itself back into its original shape. I kept it tucked away and had it examined by a field scientist, it didn't bring up anything other than the exact material popping up in several other crash sites, two of them you know about, Dakota," Ford said.

I took a moment to think about Ford's statement. I have heard of several "crashes" where unidentified compounds were located inside an oddly behaving metallic sheeting that was shoved in between the ass cheeks of a curious onlooker of the scene, but only one where a soldier found something that matched the description.

"I have heard about something like that being recovered with the Roswell incident, and a couple reports out of the Black Forest in Germany just before the second World War," I replied.

Ms. Grey slightly jumped when I mentioned the Black Forest crash that took place about eleven years before the Roswell, New Mexico incident. Something

about the vibe she gave off indicated, at least to me, that she was personally involved.

"I know. The people I work for were involved in studying everything that was stored on the crafts. Many of the crashes actually had casualties, however, the Black Forest incident actually had one survivor. Ain't that correct, Ms. Grey?" asked Ford.

Either the drugs were still lingering in my system, or the information was just too overwhelming to handle. I had my ideas about Ms. Grey not being completely human, but what was throwing me off was the implication that I was actually correct! Ms. Grey shivered in the very instance her name was referenced.

"You are correct, Mr. Ford," she acknowledged.

Ford started to nod his head in agreement when a buzzer sounded from his chair. A small tablet was attached to a dock towards the back of the chair, which Ford reached for and began tapping against its surface.

"Shit," he whispered, "We have to get you two out of here."

"What is going on?" asked Jerry.

"The Council is coming. You two can't be here, they think all visible field officers are a sign of laziness and get very temperamental. We have to at least get you walking out the door within the next five minutes or all of our asses will get burned. Ms. Grey, would you please escort our friends here?" asked Ford.

Ms. Grey nodded her head and jumped out of her chair, leaving her clipboard to dance upon its surface

after leaping from her hand. She seemed to have possessed the telekinetic ability because her hands did not move in any way in that brief moment. To be honest, compared to everything else that happened later, that moment somehow gave me a sense of what was to come. Inhuman powers of all varieties were slowly swarming the world as we desperately tried to unveil the very secrets that brought them.

Ms. Grey lead Jerry and me through a series of corridors completely made of the same material as the room we just left. Agents, much like Ford, were positioned in each room. Some of them simply sat back and asked questions to whoever happened to be strapped to a chair or used various methods to “politely coax” what they wanted. This wasn't some sort of hidden federal office or even some fucked up torture chamber for high profile criminals. As I let my eyes read my environment I started to piece together what was trying to engulf my presence. I was located in a facility meant to monitor and police activities and phenomena beyond “normal” human capacity. The people in the chairs, in one way or another, were just like me. We were capable of pulling off talents the mainstream knowledge thought only existed in comic books and we were being studied like rats.

Hitler was a huge believer in the paranormal and wanted to even utilize his subjects for war, so the United States brought several of his scientists over to give details about the various experiments conducted.

Rumor stands that the those in charge were deeply impressed by what was offered, so they allowed for the experiments to continue under even stricter guidelines. By the look of my surroundings, it was safe to say that the general concept for those guidelines was to recruit some, study all, and dispose of anything that went wrong. The last conclusion came forward as ten bloodied body bags were rolled past me right as Ms. Grey revealed our exit.

“This is your stop,” she said.

“Thank you, Sasha. Is there anything else?” Jerry asked.

“Make sure you fill in Dakota on everything else. Ronald has suggested we keep him monitored for what is to come.”

“Will do. Take care of yourself.”

Ms. Grey nodded her head and walked away. She didn't seem to be accustomed to meaningless “good-byes” that are a part of typical human activities at the time. But based on her environment she might have misconstrued violent acts as normal and was trying to reject as much contact as possible. Figures that a child from the stars would have more sense in what is wrong on this planet than those who have been here for all of their life.

A large door opened up in front of us. Magnetic locks clicked apart and air pressure slipped through the cracks. Footsteps echoed throughout the hall, making it seem that there was twice the amount of feet wan-

dering around. The drugs must have finally worn off because I was finally able to piece together more of my surroundings. As the gigantic metal slabs tucked themselves away into the foundation, a long hallway with a metallic conveyer belt that ran to a pair of handle-less doors appeared. It was hard to tell, but it looked like something was blocking the exit, like a containment wall. It would be nearly impossible to tell what came through these halls.

"You might want to close your eyes and hold your breath," Jerry warned.

A horn sounded off from a line of speakers implanted in the walls. Whoever was at the other end needed to get our attention for what was coming.

"Please keep your arms out at least five inches from your waist, and keep mouths and eyes shut until directed otherwise. Disinfection screening will begin momentarily," announced a male voice.

Air pumps started pressing against the walls full of tiny holes in the walls exposed themselves, releasing a mist that burned the surface of my skin. I was being exposed to a disinfection spray that must have been used to keep biological contaminants at bay. Maybe there were some tests involving biological warfare and alien viruses that required disinfection protocols to keep the chances of an intergalactic plague from spreading.

In most scenarios, it had been theorized that a legitimate alien visitation would result in an event much like what happened with the Native Americans when

Columbus arrived, even if the visitors were benevolent in nature. Some even tossed around the chance that the opposite would happen and a virus, easily curable with our own medicine, could bring about the end of entire worlds. The complexity of the DNA and genetic mutations it would nearly be impossible to predict without testing. Lord knows how many died of infection before preventative measures were put in.

As the conveyer belt started, I followed Jerry's suggestions to keep my eyes and mouth shut while positioning my arms. The sprays that rushed into our bodies acted as they were trying to pry my mouth open as they burned their way through my lips, leaving a very nasty taste on my tongue. Whatever chemicals were used to make the spray might as well be used to clean oil spill for how thorough they search for bacteria and virus cells. Every part of my body was covered by a stinging sensation, much like how hydrogen peroxide reacts to an open wound, during the entire length of the belt ride.

The air pressure soon became lighter as the spray no longer could cover my body in its mists. I opened my eyes and found Jerry and me on the other side of the clear wall. We looked at each other, to see if the other wasn't having any weird side effects to the spray. A clicking noise popped out of a nearby speaker just before the same male voice appeared.

"If you still feel the tingling sensation from the spray, that should fade away within the next few mo-

ments. Hopefully, you didn't inhale too much of it," it said.

"Don't worry, we're good," Jerry yelled.

I followed Jerry as he pushed through the handle-less doors and entered an office area. Immediately, I began to think that we had just entered an employee only area. I took a quick look around the room I stood and found nothing to suggest that the area was used to bring in anyone that the Suits monitored. In fact, I didn't see any of the Suits that stalked me before I found out about the agency they were a part of. Instead, there were just normal people dressed in corporate casual attire, and wearing headphones with tiny microphones attached, sitting in front of several computers. As I listened to some of their conversations, I realized that this was some sort of call center.

"I bet you are a bit confused," said Jerry.

"You read my mind. What is this place?" I asked.

"It is what it looks like, a call center. But instead of taking on customer service issues, these people keep on the lookout for any reports of strange events going from ghosts to unclassified animals to weird lights in the sky. If it's legit, and it's freaky, these geniuses catalog it then send the information to the nearest field officer."

"I see, so what does that make me?"

"I'm not quite sure yet. You are a special case, at least from what I understand. Word is that there is a conflict of agendas involving where to place you."

“What do you mean?”

Jerry was handed a sheet of paper with very faint writing by one of the phone operators. I could barely make out any details through the back of the paper because the lights from the ceiling couldn't sink through the fibers. Whatever was on that paper caused Jerry to stress out, as noted by his habit of nearly crushing the front of his skull with his own hand out of frustration.

“Alright, you and I need to get out of here. Looks like we have work to do,” he sighed.

Jerry handed me the paper so I could read into our instructions. Every country in the world has been avoiding another major war, but nobody knew the full reason. Some put the blame on financial struggles, but very few knew money was the very tip of the iceberg. Based the information in my own files, at least three nations had significant access to influence from the stars. The United States and Russia had joint efforts, even though a majority was swapping around findings. Most of the “leaps” took place after the second world war, but ties to extraterrestrials have been noted throughout history.

Therefore, the tasks that could have been embedded in that sheet of paper could have been extensive. Anything from more assassinations to terrorizing some random looky-loos could have been on there, but surprisingly enough nothing of the sorts was on there. In fact, I was even more surprised to see that it was a call to action letter.



*"To all Field Officers,*

*"In the coming months, there will be struggles across the planet due to currently unknown frequencies originating from several locations from around the globe. At this time, our scientists have been unable to make any progress in identifying the sources of the frequencies, due to the conditions in which they were discovered. Based on the information collected, the frequencies (now being dubbed "The Pings") seem to originate from underwater structures that are a few hundred to a few thousand years old, and their behavior is very similar to a distress beacon. For the most part, they are undetectable to the naked ear. But that hasn't slowed the gradual increase in violent deaths since the frequencies were detected, which has risen to forty-eight deaths a second as of 0200 hours yesterday morning. As for who or what is supposed to receive the signal, that still is a mystery.*

*"That being said, all agents are hereby ordered to approach future calls with extreme caution. Whether you are dealing with demonic influences or unidentified specimens in the forests, utilize extreme hazard protocol if necessary. Some individuals, and even some wildlife have exhibited bizarre and fatal behavior shortly after exposure to these frequencies when the signal was weak and barely broke the surface of the ocean. Being that these signals have increased in strength, it is expected the behavior will become much more widespread. It is possible that different mental conditions within affected individuals might act as a catalyst for even more potentially dangerous behaviors. We*

*are initiating an order for all intelligence agencies to gradually increase their output so that we may monitor and analyze any potential threats in order to keep the peace. We also ask that you all do the same by keeping an eye out in your surroundings and take action to prevent anything that could evolve into a hostile situation. Legal boundaries have caused our resources to be bound to burning flags, but our full powers cannot come into play until chaos erupts. Don't let that happen.*

*"The Council."*

My eyes met with Jerry's the very instant I was through with reading the letter. He gently shook his head in disbelief. The world was already messy, and it was about to become an all out wasteland just because a few beeps coming from thousands of feet under the ocean driving people nuts. Of course, frequencies of sound and light inducing certain behavior is a legitimate phenomenon, but that wasn't necessarily the issue. The issue was that we already lived in a world where a simple sneeze could stir up a sixty-billion dollar lawsuit, give that a supernatural jump start and you could be looking at mass murders triggered by bad breath.

As my overly creative mind began to spin like slot machines to map possible outcomes, Jerry signaled that I follow him out to his car. We hardly spoke the rest of the time we were located in the facility. I tried to get a decent look at my surroundings, just in case, there was any activity that could foreshadow what was

to come. But everything outside of the plastic prison halls resembled a big city office building; with break rooms, leaky water coolers, and cart pushers delivering office mail. As Jerry and I continued through the hallways, I continued searching for anything else that could hint at the secret activities of the government with no success.

“Stay close to me, these doors get picky about who they let through sometimes,” Jerry said.

My attention was too distracted by my unfamiliar surroundings to notice that we had arrived at an exit. Jerry moved his hand in front of a card scanner to unlock the door. Gears inside the walls smacked themselves around in the struggle to get the door open. One final thud convinced the automatic hinges to finally open the door, revealing a large parking lot. As I continued to follow Jerry out of the facility, the sunlight nearly melted my eyeballs. The lighting in the building was surprisingly dim compared to natural sunlight, somehow making it seem like we had just crawled out of a deep cave.

As my eyes adjusted, the parking lot started to sprout waves in the distance. The dirt, rocks and the bottoms of distant mountains wiggled in a place like worms on fishing hooks. Jerry had his car parked about thirty feet away. I looked around to see if I could pick out any more details that could indicate what was happening at the base. But truthfully I was a bit more curious about where the base was located. There were no

signs near the empty road, no buildings other than the base were in sight, no natural landmarks that looked familiar, no rivers, there wasn't anything around that could tell me exactly where I was. Before he took any more steps towards his car, Jerry glanced over at me and took notice of my curiosity.

"I bet you have quite a few questions," he said.

"A few," I responded, "Like where in the hell are we?"

"Don't worry, we are still in Idaho. It's about a ninety-minute drive from here to home, so you might as well get in the car."

"Fine, but you and I have a lot to talk about, like how you worked those doors."

"Microchips in my hand, son. One was installed in your hand while you were unconscious."

My eyes grew inside my skull, nearly exploding from the surprise. The Suits had placed a chip inside me like I was a lost dog. I couldn't believe it until I happened to notice some fresh scar tissue near the space between my right-hand thumb and index finger. I took my other hand and pinched the space around the scar, and quickly found the chip.

"It feels weird," I commented.

"It will feel like that for a while. Once it turns on, it takes a couple weeks to calibrate and you will start to feel some tingling in your hand," Jerry warned.

So I didn't look like an idiot feeling up my own hands, I hurried into Jerry's car. He must have been paid well by the Suits, because his rig was a pitch black,

luxury car with pitch black leather seats. I was honestly jealous because Jerry's rig was much nicer than my own. The seats pressed against my clothing as I slid into the seat, ready to leave. I started to sort through questions in my mind to ask Jerry, but nothing wanted to seed itself. Jerry jumped in the driver's side and slammed his door before patting against the surface of his pants so he could find his keys.

"So?" he asked.

"So what?" I asked.

"Got anything you want to ask?"

"How much about everything can you tell me?"

"Mostly, how we managed to keep you hidden."

"Honestly, I think that based on everything that happened, I already have a pretty good idea."

"I figured that you would. But to be honest, I also thought you would ask about your brothers and sisters."

A large bolder dropped in my stomach when Jerry mentioned my family. I had been separated from my siblings for so long that I nearly forgot about them in the chaos.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Ford had my sister keep tabs on them, so he could look for an opening that would allow for them to come home sooner."

I couldn't help but clench my fists at what I was hearing. Child Protective Services made sure that I couldn't see my little brothers and sisters after they

were taken, and knowing that they still put up a fight when higher powers intervened was unloading oceans full of salt into the wounds. I may have taken part in acts of vigilante justice, but god damn it I would never do anything to hurt those kids.

"Did he find one?" I asked, afraid of the answer.

"Yes, but some idiot on the inside made for damn sure it didn't go through. There wasn't much else that could be done without drawing too much attention."

"So there is nothing that can be done?"

"I wouldn't say that," Jerry grinned, "Your brothers are with an awfully neglected home, there might just be an order placed to have them taken to where your youngest sisters are being kept. Because it is probably best to keep them from your other sister and your idiot cousin. No offense."

"None taken. I know it's true," I said. I really couldn't take much offense to the idea. My sister was acting like a complete idiot while in foster care, making it nearly impossible to get my father behind bars. My annoying cousin, who tried to convince her to shut up to shut up about our father sexually assaulting her and the other kids. Wait, did I forget to mention that part?

No matter, it was already too late to do anything. And it was obvious that even with the shadow government's help I wasn't even able to visit the little monsters known as my little brothers and sisters. I even tried to negotiate a way just to see the littlest ones after I heard that CPS was worried I would somehow

compromise my sister by seeing her. Yet, as I probably should have expected, I still got shut out. Inevitably, this forced to at least accept the fact that somehow this arrangement kept them safe. But truthfully, I was glad to hear that the youngest ones would still be together. They shouldn't have had to deal with any of what was going on. No one should have, but it was a war fought with blind soldiers, always walking into each other. Thankfully I had other activities to keep me distracted.

In my silence, Jerry started the car and drove out of the lot. A series of gates blocked us in while on the drive away, which opened at a wave of Jerry's hand. The chip must be able to unlock certain areas from a distance, but Jerry timed the reaction so he could pretend to possess telekinesis. Yet, whenever he saw my abilities in action he would tense up. I guess messing around with technology was easier for him to comprehend.

My mouth started to quiver a bit as my mind attempted to unscramble the only question that really needed to be answered. One of which split the lines between past demons and future wars.

"So what happens now?" I asked.

Jerry took a deep breath. "In short, we give our current... 'activities' a steroid boost."

I wasn't exactly sure what he meant because our times together often ended up in a complete mess that mimicked action movies. If someone gave it a steroid

boost, the government might as well declare a civil war. We weren't afraid to paralyze a suspect that tries to avoid being arrested, even when we knew some idiot lawyer would try to gather a lynch mob in order to make a name for themselves because of it. Our actions could have easily put us on the FBI's radar for domestic terrorism if the Suits hadn't cloaked us.

"What do you mean?" I asked him.

"I am pretty sure you know what I mean. With the beeps making people looney, we are going to have to be prepared for anything. Nothing is going to be safe anymore. Kids have to worry about getting shot while at school, babies won't be able to live past three months because of stupid parents, and nobody is gonna trust a cop because the dirty ones get easily discovered," he ranted.

Something clicked in my mind when Jerry mentioned dirty cops. Something that dragged itself against my mind once I realized it was going to be another threat to the overall operation. A hidden force that has completely dissipated from view in the last few days of chaos.

"Jerry, what the hell happened to Cortez?" I asked him, "Was he ever found?"

Jerry took his left hand and smacked it hard against his forehead. "Shit, I completely forgot about him," he grunted.



"A cop is responsible for one of the bloodiest massacres in the area, and he is forgotten about? What in the Hell else happened?"

"It's not like that. Trust me, I wish it was something else."

"What do you mean?"

Jerry took his left hand off his face and started to roll up his sleeve. I watched as three long lines of stitched up scar tissue, nearly jumping to the tune of Jerry's heartbeat, revealed themselves across the entire length of his arm. The wounds were nearly a couple days old, about the same time Jessica's incident occurred. Something must have happened down where the bodies were located. Once the sleeve was completely rolled up, I could see that the marks were not just any scratches. They were deep, jagged, almost animal-like and worst of all appeared like they came from a heated source.

"Shit, you got tagged," I said while burying my face in my hands. I knew exactly what those cuts came from.

"By what exactly?" he asked.

"A demon."

Jerry's face nearly dropped through the bottom of the car. I couldn't help but think that on some level, he knew what my answer was going to be, but also hoped I would say something else.

"I guess we are really are going to be hosing down Hell, huh?" I asked jokingly.

"Yeah, apparently," he whispered.

I didn't realize it at the time, but Jerry hated the news that we would have to step up our game to combat what was coming. But in the following months, he had no choice, we had no choice. We were given special gadgets which monitored the Pings Ford warned us about. When the monitors started to pick up any increasing frequencies, we knew to make sure our weapons already had a bullet in the barrel. At first, the chaos that erupted was small scale with occasional schoolyard brawls and incidents of vandalism. The only time I really got involved with those calls was when a friend of mine was targeted. In the meantime I spent my new source of income to fund a few investigations, even bringing Shandra along for a few of them.

As the months went on, the Pings slowly increased in intensity. Each time a spike registered, crimes and supernatural activity followed suit in nearly the same increments. Small fender benders became contests to see who could flatten the most cars. Small whispers from spirits in the shadows became screams from blade-toothed entities. The increases seemed small, so it never drew much attention to media outlets. The ones that did pick up on something were quickly silenced by the government's media monitoring groups, individuals that helped keep some illegal activities of presidential figures at bay.

Because the intensity of crime became too hard to tuck away from the public eye, Shandra became aware

of what I did. She saw with her own eyes that I had a dark side, she even saw the face of my Shadow Hunter. I could sense she was somewhat fearful of what she saw but some parts of her made her stick around. She came to know my demons better than most people and still did not run. Often times I could help but think she felt obliged to stick around because I helped her with her own evils, but I never questioned it. I didn't bring it up to avoid sounding like an ass.

But thanks to my silence, Shandra was actually able to help with the Pings without realizing it. In our downtime, Jerry and I tried to map out the affected areas across the planet so we could try to understand the frequencies better. Other agents posted around the globe gave frequent reports on the activity they witnessed within their jurisdictions, which helped pinpoint how and when the Pings stirred up. We quickly found that instead of all the Pings turning up at once, as the Council's letter suggested, but rather followed a circular motion around the planet. Shandra happened to find some of the data I had stored at my desk and suggested that what I was tracking was somehow tied to the phases of the moon.

She helped my line up the frequency time line, which consisted of data collected in the six months after the Council sent out the letter, with a moon phase calendar to test her theory. We were in my office as this revelation came forward to us. The data collected was all gathered onto a document on my computer to

make it easier to work with. She helped me find that the spikes actually stirred up according to the moon phases. In regions that see the full moon, the Pings would be much lower in strength. When the moon was hard to spot in the sky, the Pings would become spike even higher than the last occurrences.

Given the patterns we decoded, the best explanation for the phenomena was that rather than being a distress beacon of some sort, it served kinda like a lighthouse. The only question left was what turned on the light. I forwarded the information to Ford so his tech guys could move forward in finding out who exactly is approaching the "light." I also made sure to leave a side note in the message to let him know that his daughter deserved the credit. He noted back that she would soon get a gift in return, as long as I kept his existence silent. He had to keep everyone he knew under the assumption he was dead in order to keep his job. Within a couple months, he had a portable piano delivered to my house so we could both surprise her for her birthday. She used to have a piano at home she would play all the time until her mother's abusive husband destroyed it in an episode of rage.

In the months after Shandra's birthday, everything was going well. The Pings continued driving people crazy, but by the end of the year all agents were so used to the growing chaos, they were able to prevent most of the major crimes that followed without my assistance. I was mostly ordered to focus on investigations in my

area. The Suits had answers for themselves, but they allowed me to do plenty of side work which helped extend their databases. Everything was going well for quite some time. But unfortunate events soon began to corrupt the perfect image, once the snow began to fall.



## Chapter 4

# Fast Forward A Year

A couple months after my grandpa died, Shandra decided that she wanted to move into my place. Her mother was okay with the arrangement, only cause Shandra told her the move was so she was able to better build a life for herself. In truth, Shandra was still afraid for her life, and no matter how many times I tried to convince her otherwise, we eventually became joined at the hip. At first, it was a bit much but I knew that after a while she would relax a bit and start going off on her own. While I waited for that day to happen, I took Shandra on more paranormal investigations. Two of the cases, little did Shandra know, were the first battles of the war.

The first case started as a demonic disturbance in a house a few miles from Murtaugh. The client initially reported that she would hear several strange footsteps,

but after some work, Shandra and I managed to find a sealed off well in the basement of the house. The well itself was surrounded by a dark red aura, and if you stood on it, you would get the sensation that something was dragging you into the ground. My psychic visions and confirmation from a spirit revealed that a body was inside the well itself... and it was a sealed off portal to Hell.

But that didn't stop Abraxon from coming through to give me a warning about a visitor from the sky being just outside the house. I went to investigate his claim, only to be absorbed into a ship and given a strange weapon by an extraterrestrial by the name of Ashtar. This weapon was capable of shifting itself into any form I could think of and would never run out of ammo.

It wasn't long though before I had the chance to test it. Just outside the ship, several Suits had surrounded us and fired. They were trying to shoot us out of the sky! Ashtar immediately ejected me from his ship, allowing me to return fire. In the process, I was able to discover that there was a secondary operation, to kidnap Shandra.

Being that I had told Ford about the potential threats to his daughter, my first thoughts sketched him to be the one that made the order. But after bashing his head through a few walls, he finally revealed a traitor was amongst the higher ranks. A sabotage mission was in progress and no one knew who or what was



in on it. Not only were Heaven and Hell dealing with mysterious disappearances, the Suits were also dealing with missing agents. The only conclusion anyone could think of was that an army was coming together.

The military itself was preparing for an invasion as part of a global joint effort. Satellite feeds pointing towards the heavens and lands helped trace isolated incidents all across the globe. Indigenous tribes in several isolated areas around the world were some of the first to make contact with the scout waves. Unfortunately... many of them met with extinction by unusual circumstances. Government scientists went to each spot to find alien bacteria and viruses spreading everywhere, some of which had flesh eating qualities. Other landing zones, where death didn't follow, unusual markings were left behind. Some of which closely resembled ancient tribal texts.

Extremely high radiation readings also made the sites extremely difficult for the scientists to work in. The energy levels were in such a concentrated zone that it was able to break through their protective suits. Even though the levels that broke through were similar to radiation of a hot summer's day, the fact something leaked through was a safety concern. Radiation poisoning, cancer, and mutated creatures would giveaway that something was going on and make it impossible to avoid confrontations with idiots jumping to doomsday scenarios. But to my knowledge nothing came into fruition, however that doesn't escape the idea those

aware of what was coming were simply too distracted to notice.

As things continue to build on, hiding the truth quickly became harder and harder to do as the extraterrestrial forces began moving to more populated areas. They appeared to use ancient monuments to send messages that no one in the general population was able to decipher. Even with extraterrestrial ties, the Suits were only able to piece together three general messages.

“WE ARE HERE...”

“WE ARE TAKING OVER...”

“WE ARE YOUR RULERS NOW.”

Yeah... war was coming. But who were the new rulers? On a stormy night in July, some answers about what was to come came crashing down in streaks of lightning.

Radiation readings revealed an unusual spike around an old air force base about 15 miles from Murtaugh. This time, the radiation triggered a lightning storm that was unusually strong for the area. The strikes actually struck four to five times in the same spot within a matter of seconds. The lack of randomness in how the lightning maneuvered almost made it look like something was directing it to attack someone.

By Ford's order, and my own personal curiosity, I used the weapon given to me by Ashtar to mold my grandparent's old motorcycle into a weaponized flying machine to investigate. The weapon, often dubbed the

Ashtarian, was capable of fusing itself to other machines to improve their performance. To be honest, it was just cool to ride a silver motorcycle from outer space through the sky. But that was beside the point.

As I rode through the skies, I got a closer look at what was happening. Inside the clouds, a dark humanoid shadow would appear during every strike. As I approached the shape, I was able to make out more details about the shadow. It was male, very tall and very large in stature. Some of the details looked rather unusual for it to be a typical person. There were metallic glimmers coming off the body, whatever was there had armor on. Inside the shadow's hands was a strange object that emitted blue balls of light. The balls of light quickly changed into blue streaks of lightning. This entity was utilizing a direct energy weapon, and under these circumstances, I was dealing with one thing only, a God!

This deity was pissed off, and killing soldiers. Alarms were sounding off as I landed in the middle of the base. Soldiers tried to confront me as I was getting off the Ashtarian motorcycle and shifted it into a rifle form, but lightning soon burned them to death.

One soldier was crouched underneath a large chunk of a hanger wall that was broken off of a building just moments before. I hurried over to see if he was alright. Other than a few bruises and scrapes, he was going to be okay physically. Mentally, however, the poor guy wasn't ever going to recover. In his hands, there was

a blood-covered picture of two young ladies. One of them was his wife, the other was his teenage daughter. People he thought he would never get to see again.

It was hard to get his attention, but eventually, I was able to get him to spill what he knew about what was happening. He told me there was a project going on underground that he was aware some other parties were interested in, parties willing to sabotage the progress. He was expecting a rogue espionage mission, but not lightning attacks.

He went on to describe the project that drew the deity's attention. An energy nexus, a manifestation of the Earth's magnetic field that controls the actions of the general population, was located about 3 miles underneath the base of the nearby mountains and was brought into the base in order to weaponize it. The basic plan was to use it to generate chaos in targeted regions, but there were issues with the designs. The scientists on the job had a hard time getting the nexus to stabilize so it was easier to manage. During the final stages, when they were getting closer, that was when the lightning attacked.

He described to me exactly what he noticed about the attacker. The soldier described the exact figure I noticed on my flight to base. One detail he mentioned, told me everything I needed to know in order to piece together the identity of the attacker... the Norse god of war Thor.

Before every launch of lightning bolts, a goat-like sound would ring out. The god, Thor, was said to have ridden around in a goat drawn carriage, which allowed him to take to the skies. Knowing the identity of the attacker, I knew that the battle would be rough. Norse gods were war crazed nut jobs that wouldn't stop fighting even when their limbs were chopped off and still bleeding. As I aimed the Ashtarian rifle towards the shadow in the sky, I readied for a long hard battle.

The energy shot I fired hit the target, and several explosions followed as Thor crashed down. I couldn't see where he landed, but that was soon revealed as he launched a lightning bolt straight into my chest. That strike should have killed me, but part of the Ashtarian broke itself off and modeled itself into armor that absorbed every bit of it. Being that I didn't die, Thor was even angrier. It was on.

He used his chariot drawn by two goat-like creatures with metallic wings, each named Tannggrisnir and Tanngnjóstr, to charge me. I used the Ashtarian rifle to continue to shoot his chariot to level the fight. As the ropes holding the goats in place broke off, Thor's hammer Mjolnir slammed against my chest. I flew backward, as the ground slowly tried to bury me as my body made contact with the world. It felt as if I was hit so hard I was getting shorter.

I retaliated by shifting the Ashtarian into a shape similar to Mjolnir and started bashing into Thor's arm every chance I got. Because I couldn't picture the inner

workings of his hammer, I needed to get Thor to let it go just long enough for me to mold the Ashtarian around it. The Ashtarian itself had its own memory system and its own emergency response system. Both helped craft an effective defense against many attackers, especially Thor. Every attack he tried that I wasn't able to spot of time, the Ashtarian blocked.

After fighting for almost an hour, I was finally able to get Thor to drop Mjolnir and let the Ashtarian fuse itself to it. Parts of my weapon quickly formed gauntlets around my arms and a belt around my waist. Mythology stated that Thor was only able to pick up his hammer by using "magical" gloves and a belt. As soon as the Ashtarian finished its formation, I felt several tiny needles break through my skin and my entire body started to tense up. The gauntlets and belt weren't magical at all, they were mechanical acupuncture devices that emitted enough of an electric pulse to enhance muscle strength and adrenaline flow.

The effects of the needles sank into my system almost immediately. I felt the drive and the urge to fight overcome my entire body nearly tenfold of anything else I have ever felt. The pain of seeing Shandra hurt during our time together, seeing Jessica amongst a pile of bloody bodies, every pain I knew that I had either witnessed or felt from the people I helped amplified and molded together into one ultimate power. By using that power, I threw Mjolnir right at Thor's head and sent him flying. He was angry and launched

one last attack. I countered with the Ashtarian, which emitted the same levels of energy as Mjolnir. Both of our weapons made contact, causing one last explosion which leveled the entire base. The Ashtarian, for some odd reason, coated both Thor and I both in a protective metal layer that allowed us to both still be standing even though we were the epicenter of the blast.

Thor saw that my weapon tried to save him, causing him to come to the conclusion I could actually serve as an ally for the war. Once he realized how I came across my own weapon, he came forward about what he was doing. Even though he didn't speak English (in fact his language sounded very close to German) I could understand him on a psychic level. He knew they were trying to mess with a power that could potentially kill millions, so he decided to kill them first and then take the energy nexus.

I informed him even if he were to kill them all, somebody would still go in to take over. As far as finding out where the energy nexus was located, our best bet was to leave the base like we tired ourselves out. Thor agreed and summoned his goat chariot and took to the skies in a blinding flash of white light while I took to the skies myself on my Ashtarian in motorcycle form and flew back to my grandparent's house.

Shandra was standing on the back deck waiting for me. We were both staying the night in Murtaugh because of road construction that tore out the road in front of my house, making it impossible to drive in or

out. We were able to park out in the graveyard and sneak by to get the things we needed but it was illegal to be at the graveyard after hours if you weren't an employee (or a dead body).

But that didn't matter, even when run by the crack-head city planner, eventually the job was done. Shandra and I had much more important matters to deal with. The following months after the battle with Thor, I noticed heightened Suit activity nearly everywhere we went. Ford had requested a protection order on us to help combat Shandra's potential attackers. The Suits were ordered to keep their distance but stay close enough so we could tell they were around. Shandra never acted like she noticed them, but the way her eyes would zone out in their direction told me otherwise. I personally was relieved seeing them, knowing that somebody was out there trying to protect her in case something happened to me.

But I forgot one thing... even the Suits, Heaven and Hell were dealing with traitors. Anybody could try to kill her. Anyone from the brightest of angels to the cruelest of demons could burst through at any moment.

Then... in late December of the year 2012... I watched as the battle leaked into my life and my town.



## Chapter 5

# Outcasted By Hell

December 21, 2012... probably one of the days shrouded most in conspiracy theories. It was nearly impossible to go a single day without hearing some whack job ranting and raving about it being the end of the world. Most would try to quote the Mayan Calendar and Nostradamus Prophecy in order to justify their beliefs without ever actually studying them. Thousands upon thousands of kids would write into various government-funded scientific programs about their concerns, many even quoting that they were planning to commit suicide so they wouldn't have to deal with whatever was coming.

Everyone who bothered to even research the subjects tried their best to get the word out that just about every excuse to justify the end of days were false. There were more Mayan Calendars that went on about

another five thousand years. Nostradamus prophecy still had another two thousand years worth of predictions. In fact, a little-known bit about Nostradamus is that he continued writing prophecy until the day before he died, simply because he knew he wouldn't be able to continue on. If the world did end, what point is there in writing about more prophecy? In retrospect though, I have to wonder if somehow the timelines were altered from the ones Nostradamus had been able to foresee. The beings that came from the woodwork, long forgotten or even never known to mankind, certainly had the power to do it.

But that is not the point. Truth is something devastating was coming. Something a very select few knew about before it happened. Some even questioned whether or not those who instinctively knew about the coming war were actually distant descendants of some ancient prophet. I wouldn't deny the possibility and maybe I would have done some research on it if I had the chance. Chaos filled nearly every crevice of the planet as the Pings grew stronger, and there was still no progress on finding out their source. The chaos became too overwhelming for everyone. Shandra and I were both at school when the fighting finally erupted.

The twentieth was the last day of school before Christmas Break, just before the alleged doomsday. It was a half day, so naturally, everybody was feeling a bit off in preparation for the time off, but that day was unusual. Rather than ranting and raving about their

Christmas plans, nearly everyone was trying to start an all out brawl. The children here were obsessed with fighting and the school administration did nothing to put a stop to it. The signals from the Pings fed on this obsession and drove nearly everyone bat shit crazy. Those of us who tried our best to stay out of it, barricaded ourselves in rooms near all the exits while everyone else “partied” in the hallways. The school was trying everything it can to protect their reputation so they didn't lose any more funding by ignoring the issues.

Fucking. Selfish. Idiots. in my honest opinion.

Shandra and I were both sitting back in one of the science classrooms, helping prepare the teacher's pet fish for the long winter. We both tried to stay calm while listening to the fighting that was happening just outside. A series of windows to our left revealed that the brawls were happening on the outside of the school as well. Fresh blood stains painted bruised bodies covered the bottoms of the walls. The violence had become so intense that people were literally throwing each other twenty feet into the air. I tried my best to ignore what was happening, but Shandra felt uneasy.

“What the heck is wrong people?” Shandra asked staring at the wall closest to the exit after someone slammed into it.

“Too many ways to list, to be honest,” I answered.

Before Shandra could continue, my phone went off inside my jeans pocket. I took it out and observed the screen to see who was calling.

"Who is it?" Shandra asked.

"It's... Jerry," I told her.

Shandra had a confused look on her face. We both had the same thought in our head, 'Why was he calling?' If he wanted help containing the fighting outside, he was going to need to call in SWAT. The Ashtarian could easily find a way to take them all out, but letting me loose on a crowd of people may not look good. Plus the idiots in the administration would find a way put the blame on me.

Nevertheless, something was going on and the police were calling on me for help. I answered the phone and listened for clues in the background. Shandra tuned her ears on the conversation.

"Hey Jerry, what's going on?" I asked.

"Dakota, can you and Shandra come down to my office? There is something that I need to run by you really quick," he said.

"Yeah, sure. Just give us a few minutes to work through the crowds outside."

"Actually, I think this might have something to do with the fighting going on."

*"How in the Hell is that possible?"* Shandra asked in her mind.

"Let's see first," I said.

"I have never seen anything like it, please get here as soon as possible," Jerry whispered, "I also may think it has something to do with Shandra, or rather who is after her."

As Jerry hung up the phone, I tucked my phone back into my pocket and stared into Shandra's eyes. Finally, there was a lead on who or what was trying to kill her.

"What's wrong?" Shandra asked, "I couldn't hear the last bit of the call."

"Jerry thinks he may have a lead on who is after you."

Shandra's eyes grew so wide at the news. I honestly couldn't tell if she was excited to hear that we were closer to catch her attacker before he had a chance to try anything, or if she afraid her death was one step closer. Either way, she deserved to know the truth about what was happening since the attack was focused on her.

"Shouldn't we go then?" Shandra asked.

"Of course," I told her.

We both looked over to our teacher who was half asleep reading the newspaper by his desk, occasionally glancing at the clock on his computer to see how long until the final bell sounded. There was no point in running our leave by him since he would likely not notice. We each set down the fish tank supplies in the cabinets below the tank and quietly stepped out of the room. Two boys trying to place each other in a choke

hold met us by the door. I kicked them into a row of lockers across the hall and grabbed Shandra's hand as we ran through the hallways.

Our bodies twisted and turned to avoid getting wrapped up in fights. A fifty-foot walk soon quickly became a hundred mile journey because of how crowded and chaotic the hallways became. We turned the corner to enter the main hallway of the school where the administration offices were located. Jerry was standing outside his office door with his hand on his pistol, ready to fire warning shots. As we got closer to him, he opened the door while drawing out his pistol. We both made one final sprint as he fired three rounds into the ceiling.

"SWAT is going to be in exactly two minutes. If none of you get back into class RIGHT NOW, they will be barging through every entrance in this school and I don't think they will be nice enough to use stun rounds," Jerry shouted once the crowds became quiet.

Once the crowds actually started to follow his orders, Jerry came into his office to greet us.

"Please tell me those were blanks," I said.

"Don't worry, I wouldn't waste good bullets," he joked.

"It's not funny dude," I warned him.

"What's the matter? Aren't blanks just fancy pop-caps?" asked Shandra, "You can't kill anyone using them, right?"

"Only at close range or if something goes wrong with the gun, blanks can be fatal, otherwise you can still hurt someone," I answered, "But let's get to why we are here."

"Yes, of course," Jerry sighed, "Have a seat, you two."

Shandra and I took a seat in two chairs in front of Jerry's desk, each one with wooden sides and red cushions at the backs and seats. Jerry sat down as well and began messing around on his computer looking for something. Once his hands settled, he turned his computer monitor to face us, revealing a video file.

"What is this?" I asked.

"It is a video message my brother sent me from the base he is stationed at near Cuba. Watch it," he said.

He pressed the spacebar on the keyboard to play the video. On the screen the image of a man with a strong resemblance to Jerry standing inside a large tent. He was facing directly into the camera with a tired, ragged look on his face, looking as if he had just witnessed something horrible.

"Tracey, I don't have much time so I need you to listen to little brother. I don't think that I am going to make it home, ever. Something came out of the water and is attacking the entire base. It isn't a craft, no soldiers, not some fucked up monster from the depths of Hell, I can't tell what it... you... before...son of..." the man said before the video malfunctioned and stopped playing. As the signal became corrupted, the images of a black mass filled the screen. It was hard telling what

it was doing to Jerry's brother, but it was obvious that it was giving off electrical interference in the process to mask its actions.

"Tracey?" Shandra asked.

"It's Jerry's first name. He hates it when people outside of his family call him that so everyone refers to him as, Jerry," I whispered to her, "So did you bring us here about the black mass that got your brother?"

"Yeah," he whispered, "Keep watching, I added a little something to the video for you."

A few seconds later another video started to play, this one showing feeds from several security cameras placed around the school. The time stamp on each video feed displayed, "12/21/2012 07:30.00," when they started to play. The time gradually increased as the video sped through each frame, displaying kids slowly walking into school. Shadow figures would appear to merge with whoever showed up in the frame, almost instantly making them grow hostile towards their surroundings. The video soon increased its playback speed, revealing hundreds of shadows possessing unsuspecting kids just to turn them into the violent maniacs from moments earlier. The video stopped when the clock on the time stamp read, "13:23.02," about ten minutes before Jerry called me.

"Now the cameras here are similar to ones you guys use on your little hunts, correct?" asked Jerry.

Shandra and I both nodded.



"Okay, then, what the hell are those things?" Jerry asked.

"Those shadow figures... they shouldn't be doing that," Shandra replied, "Right, Dakota?"

Shandra sounded worried when she asked me that question. I couldn't answer her right away because something about the figures looked unusual. They looked more solid than others and simply felt stronger.

"These figures aren't remnants of human souls," I said, "If they are then they are ancient."

My Shadow Hunter appeared behind Jerry. He had an intense look plastered on his face. Something about the shadow beings bothered him. He didn't bother speaking about it, just to avoid being as sensed by Jerry and Shandra.

"What do you mean?" Jerry asked.

"They are too dark and too strong to be normal," I answered, "And it was hard to tell but I am pretty sure these ones purposely avoided certain people."

"What? Like a 'pure of heart' type of situation?" asked Shandra.

"More like '*outcasted by Hell*' to be honest," I answered, "Just look."

I used one hand to turn the computer monitor towards Jerry while using the other to move the mouse closer to me so I could use it. I could have sworn that one of the video frames happened to show five individuals the shadows completely avoided.

I managed to get the video to start playing a few moments before the spot I thought I saw the abnormal behavior in the shadow forces. Once I thought I saw it again, I paused the video and used the mouse cursor to point out the five people I noticed the shadows were ditching.

The first feed I focused on came from the sports lobby/trophy room towards the back of the school where I noticed the shadows avoiding two people.

"Marcus Tyler, terrorized since he was five about his two gay fathers. Micasia Jones, adopted through an international adoption agency at the age of nine after she watched her parents and her younger brother get gunned down. She was also teased severely due to her accent and phobias of anything that reminded her of her family's killers," I said.

My theory started to form that the shadows were ignoring people who were trying to make the best out of their personal Hell, and were succeeding. Marcus and Micasia fit this profile perfectly and, much like Shandra and I, they eventually became a couple while helping each other conquer their troubles.

In another camera feed, pointed more towards the cafeteria, another gap in the shadows was obvious. I moved the mouse cursor to point out the only person that wasn't driven crazy.

"June Norris has had romantic feelings for other girls since elementary school but didn't open up about them until the seventh grade. Ever since then, other

girls and their dumbass boyfriends would try to sexually assault her every chance they got. June eventually snapped, after a few years of torture, and tried to kill the girl that started it all," I announced, "That was until our good friend Jessica managed to convince her otherwise."

June was a sweet girl, always a smile on her face. But it was always easy to tell when another round of torture met her when in a matter of ninety minutes she would go from a laid back person to someone who was filled with hatred and humiliation. The part that was perhaps most frightening is that she would do nothing to vent her frustration, only allowing it to build and consume her. When she finally came forward about what was going on to Shandra, we tried to help put an end to it.

Shandra would try to bring in help from the teachers and even police officers to get something done about it while I would track down the guys that were involved and break their hands. Shandra's biological father would utilize his resources to keep us out of legal trouble, but at the same time, he accidentally helped keep June's attackers out of trouble as well. But perhaps the most disturbing part is that some of the teachers we went to actually advocated the violence. Nothing was able to get a permanent fix on the situation until Jessica and Brianna happened to transfer to this school and were placed in the same gym class where the latest incidents went down.

Soon after the dust seemed to settle; Shandra and I would invite Marcus, Micasia, Jessica, June, Brianna and whatever man of the week she was with at the time to group dates. We all became close friends because we all were going after the same general goal, to simply make a good life for ourselves.

"How do you know all this?" asked Jerry.

"We all became close and gone on a few ghost hunts," Shandra answered, "It tends to bring out the most hidden parts of a person."

I didn't get a chance to finish giving introductions for all of the people the shadows were avoiding, even though the last two didn't need them.

"Don't get too excited. There are still two people the shadows are ignoring," I said.

"Who?" Shandra asked.

I moved the mouse cursor over to a camera feed that showed the hallway leading to the special arts building of the school. Surrounded but a crowd of violent idiots stood myself and Shandra with one light and one dark figure standing behind us. Between us stood a light blue figure that stood about waist high. Olivia, and my alter egos, were standing by our side in case we needed a supernatural assist.

"It's us," I whispered.

"What the hell is going to happen?" Jerry asked.

"I think I may know," I answered, "Where are Jessica and Brianna?"

"They left for Utah to visit their grandparents during Christmas Break," Shandra answered.

I took a moment to think about what I was going to say. I had a theory about why the individuals residing within the camera feeds were being avoided by the Shadow army, but I needed Jessica and Brianna in order to test the notion. But regardless of the desired circumstances, I had to say something because it would be very likely that some shadows moving on their own were not going to be our only concern.

"The shadows are all avoiding people that were with us, Shandra. Particularly, people that have joined us on our ghost hunts. They are either really afraid of us, or there are other plans for us," I announced to the room.

The room fell quiet. It was no question that things were about to get very messy. But as for how it was all going to happen, or how it all tied to the warnings centered around Shandra, we were still oblivious. Perhaps that is what scared us the most.

In the silence, Shandra happened to catch something in one of the video feeds that I didn't see. She gave me two taps on the shoulder to get my attention and pointed at a feed that revealed the back parking lot. Standing between two rows of cars stood one of the Suits handing something to a student. Jerry quickly turned the monitor back while I slid the mouse back over to him. We needed to get a closer look at who the student was and what he was given.

As Jerry focused on finding a good shot of the student, I set my hand on Shandra's knee. Her head was tucked into her chest and her hair dropped to the ground like black curtains to cover her tears. Somehow she knew. I tried to think of anything that I could do in order to make her feel better.

"Hey, you're going to be okay. I won't let anything happen to you," I whispered.

"I know," she whispered, "I just can't take this. First, my mom is dying of cancer, now someone is trying to kill me. It is just too much to handle."

The fear of what was to come quickly became too much for her to bear. On top of her mother recently being diagnosed with stage three lung cancer, she herself was facing a very serious threat. There was nothing I could say or do to ease her pain, and I hated every bit of it. I was supposed to be the good boyfriend and be able to help her through anything that came along, yet all I could do was hold her head against my shoulder just to remind her that I was still there. My Light Hunter appeared next to me with an idea in his head that could help her feel better. I immediately heard the idea echo in my own mind and pieced together the best way to put it to Shandra, just so she would be on board.

"Dakota, I am going to need you tonight with that space gun of yours. Lord knows how fucking psychotic this holiday is going to be," Jerry said.

"I need to be with him," Shandra whined, "I need him in case something happens."

“Shandra, we can't have you out with us for this. It is simply too dangerous to even with Dakota's... what did you call it... Asstarian?” Jerry asked with a smile slowly growing on his face.

The tone in his voice was close to, what he always called, his “dorky dad” voice. It was one that often came out to help his daughter feel better whenever she was either sick or simply upset about something. It didn't work all of the time, but when it did he knew that his little girl would be fine. I watched as Shandra's lips grow into a gentle smile, she was going to make it through this.

“Hey,” I whispered to her, “I have an idea.”

“What is it?” she asked.

“Before I go help Jerry with the chaos tonight, why don't you get some stuff together so you can stay a few nights with your mom.”

“What do you mean?” she asked lifting her head.

“Shandra, stage three cancer is borderline the point of no return. In fact, your mom is very lucky the tumor hasn't spread. You should spend this holiday with her. It could very well be her last.”

Shandra looked away for a moment and swallowed. Her mother dying was a truth she didn't want to acknowledge, but she accepted as the truth. I tried my best to show her, ever since she first told me about what was happening, that there was a way to help heal cancer with nothing more than simple love (along with a few lifestyle changes). Basically, all Shandra had to

do was to keep her mother in a good mood and the chances of her mom beating this would improve. Simply visiting for the holidays and making some peaceful memories, would be enough to at least get Ramona on the right road to recovery.

"You're right, I should spend Christmas with my mom," she nodded, "What about you?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Who are you going to spend Christmas with?"

"To be honest, I am not sure," I answered, "It hasn't felt much like family ever since my grandpa died."

"Oh..." Shandra whispered.

"But to be honest," I interrupted, "I do have something planned just for you Christmas day that your mom has been helping me put together."

Shandra's face lit up. Something about the "surprise" was actually giving her a reason to look forward to life in itself. In fact, I could have sworn that on some level she was actually ready to give up.

"Really?" she asked.

"Would I lie to you?" I smiled.

There upon her face, in that very moment, grew a sign of hope as the small flickering flame in her eyes burst into a dancing wildfire. Her arms stretched and latched themselves around my body as she flew out of her chair. I used my arms to lock her in place, to simply embrace her new found euphoria. It all seemed almost unreal for how intoxicating the moment became. In fact, I question how real that moment was to this



day, wondering if my own mind decided to give me one last pleasing moment...

...Before absolute Hell broke loose.

I looked over to Jerry who sprouted a confused look on his face. Just by reading his eyes, I could tell he was curious about what my surprise to Shandra was (possibly to put something similar together for his wife). I gently lifted the ring finger on my left hand, just to signal what I was doing without Shandra noticing. Thankfully, Jerry realized what I was trying to say as an impressed grin chiseled its way into his skull.

The final school bell of the day sounded off for the day, signaling for the students to hurry home. Jerry stood and walked over to his office door while drawing his weapon. He had a feeling that the chaos from earlier wasn't quite over, so he opened the door to his office and stood there watching the hallways. Red and blue lights leaped through the hallways in almost circular motions.

"Hey, Dakota. Where are you parked?" Jerry asked.

"Down by the little radio station near the front parking lot, next to the road sign," I answered, "Why?"

"You two may want to walk with me so my colleagues don't harass you."

I stood up before Shandra and peaked outside the door to see what was going on. Just outside the front doors of the school stood several police and paramedic units waiting.

"How many of them are here?" I asked.

"Just about every single one that is on duty for the city, quite a few county boys as well. Enough to cover every exit to this school, and a few others over at the other school in town because something similar was going down over there. Surprisingly, nothing happened over at the elementary and middle schools," Jerry answered.

Shandra peaked her head outside the door to see what was going on. "Shouldn't we get out of here, Dakota? I just texted my mom to let her know what is going on and that we would be there at 3:30," Shandra said.

"Yeah, we probably should go," I acknowledged.

"Just stick with me, you two, people are still a bit jumpy about what has happened while you guys were working with me," Jerry said, "Do you guys have all of your stuff?"

"Yeah, I left my purse in Dakota's car," Shandra answered.

I patted down my pockets on my jacket and jeans to check if I had all of my stuff. Cell Phone, check. Keys, check. Wallet, check. Spare pen and pencil, missing but probably would turn up in the washing machine. Shandra and I didn't bother taking our normal school supplies to school that day, simply because we knew that we weren't going to need them.

"Yeah, we're good. Let's get out of here," I said.

"Thank god," Shandra whispered, "I am getting tired of this place."

"You and me both, sweetheart."

Jerry lead Shandra and me outside and past the crime scene tape surrounding the school. The other officers and paramedics were two distracted by wrangling up the bloody and cocky. Just about everyone who wasn't being shipped to the hospital was being handcuffed by police for questioning. Jerry leading us past them kept us off of their radar and let us slide into a much-needed break as we slid into the car and drove off.

"Dakota, how does Jerry know about your gun?" Shandra asked.

"He caught me trying to use it to pry open a few busted in lockers," I answered, "I showed him how it works."

"Are you sure that was a smart idea?" she asked, "It has been almost a year and you are still trying to figure it out."

"Don't worry, Jerry still gets nervous around just about everything we do."

"Which honestly is ironic considering he saw it all from the beginning, pretty much."

"Yeah, some people just can't handle the things we deal with on a day to day basis."

Shandra turned to face the school as we drove away. I could hear her mind focusing its sights on a single image, one that would probably burn into her mind for the rest of her life.

"Can we?" she whispered, "Can we even handle what is coming?"

I honestly was worried that the shadows that corrupted the people in the hallways were going to be too much for us to handle. Before I tried to answer her question, I tried to plot some sort of counter strike. The plan needed a way to hold back the invading forces. No matter what approach we tried, there was still going to be retaliation. The only thing that could be done is to find a way to channel the waves into areas they could be better managed (at least direct them away from our homes and families).

"Shandra, as long as we are together, we can take on anything that comes our way," I said.

"But how?" she asked, "How are we going to take this on? I'm sorry for freaking out, but Dakota... this isn't anything we have seen before!"

"Team meeting," I answered.

"Huh?"

As my car pulled into the driveway of my home, I whipped out my cell phone and set it up for a group text. In the "To" field, I entered in Shandra, Marcus, Micasia, June, Jessica, and Brianna's names. For the message, I typed in, "EMERGENCY VIDEO CONFERENCE AT 2 THE TEAM MAY BE IN DANGER," before I hit the send button.

"What did you just send?" asked Shandra.

"A warning to everyone," I answered.

Within seconds reply texts started flooding into mine and Shandra's phones, making them sound as if they were malfunctioning. I could almost hear every finger pressing against the phones used to participate in the conversation as I began focusing all of my attention on it. I opened up the text conversation to read what all had been said so far before I met with them all online.

Marcus: Please tell me this has something to do with what happened at school.

June: Okay, might be a couple minutes late because of computer issues though.

Jessica: Guys? WTF is going on?

Micasia: Jessica, there was a lot of fighting at school. Some kids were almost killed!

Brianna: WTF?!?!?

Shandra: Dakota thinks that the fights may have been caused by some supernatural forces that completely avoided all of us who were at school today.

Jessica: You guys had fights too?! Brianna and I have been dodging shit all day because of fights breaking out over here as well.

June: Jessica, are you and Brianna okay hun?

Brianna: We're fine. Why did I get the feeling that there was weird ass shit going on?

Marcus: So what is this meeting about?

Micasia: And who exactly is in danger?

Shandra: Dakota thinks we all are...

Jessica: WTH?!?!?!?! o.O

Micasia: WHAT DO YOU MEAN?!

Marcus: Dakota, please tell me you have a plan, bro!

Brianna: We're all going to fucking die!

June: No one is going to die, Brianna! Don't go freaking out!

Jessica: Dakota, please say something!

Micasia: Is this literally the end of the world?

Shandra: Guys, Dakota is trying to get as much information as possible before he tells you everything.

Marcus: You mean Dakota isn't even sure?

June: Not good...

Micasia: Okay, now I am scared.

"Dakota, please hurry with what you are doing! Everybody is a bit restless now," Shandra said.

"Give me a few moments, I am going to give Jerry a quick call. I need to see if he can send us the footage," I told her.

"Alright, but hurry up, we have about ten minutes to go."

"Plenty of time."

I rushed up the stairs and punched out the entryway into the attic. I had an idea that would help keep the Shadow Army at bay, but it required everyone to get their hands dirty. In order to put everything together, I needed something very rare and very powerful. As I hurried up the attic ladder, I grabbed out my phone and dialed Jerry's number. Three rings sounded off on the phone before somebody finally answered.

"Officer Jerome," he said.

"Jerry, it's me," I said, "I don't have much time."

"What'cha need Dakota?"

"Can I get you to email me the video that you showed to me and Shandra? I feel everyone else in the shot should see it."

"I already did. I also added a little something extra about the young man we saw talking with one of the Suits. It isn't looking good. The weapon is standard issue, but the bullets it is loaded with are psychic assassination rounds. Only one target managed to avoid being shot by them."

"Who was it?"

"Who do you think?!"

"You...mean..."

*'Son of a bitch,' I thought to myself, 'I was fucking an assassination target!'*

"So, they can't kill me so they manipulate me into doing their dirty work?!" I nearly shouted.

I heard some heavy noise in the background. Some voices mumbled in the background that I had a hard time understanding. I wasn't able to pick out specific words, but whatever was going on sounded important.

"No time to explain. The email should be in your inbox by now, goodbye," Jerry hurried before he hung up.

"O...kay," I whispered.

When the call screen on my phone faded into my wallpaper and the clock on my phone showed me that I only had five minutes before the emergency video con-

ference. I needed to grab something that would help keep the Shadows at bay.

"Where is it? Where is it?!" I whispered to myself.

I started sorting through my amulets to find one that was extremely rare and forged for purposes like this. It didn't have an exact name for how rare it was, but it was extremely powerful. It was the amulet gifted to me by my older self on the day my grandfather died, and after some research, I was finally able to find out what it was for. The symbols, other than my logo, were for protection, strength, and sight. The only thing I was able to come up with is that the amulet was to boost senses meant to help with a hunt.

"To fight evil, to protect what you love, to heal, and to see the enemy coming, that is what that amulet is supposed to do," reminded my Light Hunter.

"Thank you for that," I joked.

I rushed out of the attic and down the stairs with the amulet in hand to meet up with Shandra, who had the video conference pulled up on the computer. The screen had web camera and microphone built into it that Shandra and I used to talk with the others. Video feeds showing the faces of the other Paranormal Raiders began popping up on the screen, all nearly plastered with worried looks. Four frames appeared on the screen. One showed Jessica taking up more of the frame with Brianna in the background. Another frame showcased Marcus and Micasia huddled together underneath a blanket. A third frame showed June scratch-



ing the neck of a tiny kitten that was on her shoulder. The fourth and final frame was a preview window that showed how Shandra and I looked on other computers.

"Can everyone hear me okay?" I asked.

"Hey guys," Jessica said, "What the hell happened over there?"

"I am hoping that Dakota and Shandra have some answers because I am not sure," joked Marcus.

"First off, Marcus, I was actually wanting to check in on everyone after the whole ordeal," I said, "But I may have something for you all."

"What is it?" June asked.

"Get ready to screen cap. Everyone is going to need this," I said.

I held up the amulet so the symbols would be facing the camera. June immediately tapped on the screen cap button on her keyboard, she was always the one more interested in occult symbolism. Jessica took a minute to study the amulet while Marcus and Micasia quickly became confused.

"Dakota, what is that amulet called?" Jessica asked.

"It doesn't have a name, it is the only one of its kind in existence," I answered.

"Then how did you get a hold of it?" asked Brianna.

"You don't want to know," I answered.

"Okay, never mind that. What are we supposed to do with a screencap of it?" asked June.

"Hurry up and take the screencap already there isn't much time, I ordered everyone.

Everyone hurried and pressed on their devices to make them take a photo of the amulet. Some struggled with their equipment but eventually, three silent clicks verified that everyone took the photograph. Everyone was confused about my intentions, judging by the way their eyes each scanned the amulet before I finally set it down.

“Okay, Dakota... what do you want us to do with the screen shot?” asked Marcus.

“Trace every detail of the amulet to the best of your abilities up to four times and set up a perimeter around where you all plan to stay tonight by burying the traces,” I answered.

“What is going on?” Brianna asked.

“Huh?” Marcus and Micasia asked in unison.

Shandra turned to face me with a confused look on her face. Jessica had a nearly identical look on her face.

“Can you at least tell us what that amulet does?” June asked.

“The symbols on it come from several different cultures. Each one represents protection, strength, will, and sight,” I answered, “The massive fighting from earlier was caused by a Shadow Army and for some reason, they decided to avoid us. I personally believe that is because there are other plans for us.”

“How can you be sure?” asked Jessica.

“Because I have video footage from school today that shows several shadow apparitions leaping inside of people, making them go bat shit crazy. But when

we show up in the frame, there is a huge gap that surrounds us instead of something trying to make us join in on the fight," I told her, "I know you and Brianna weren't at school today but I have a feeling that we are all in danger. In a few minutes I will be sending you all an email with the video attached, please watch it to the end."

"Okay, bro," Marcus said, "But you are seriously freaking me out."

He glanced over to Micasia for a brief moment but quickly drew himself into a near panicked state when he noticed her eye's nearly crawling out of their sockets. His eyes slowly traced where Micasia was fixated on, and his jaw nearly fell from his skull as they lined up with his screen. June's kitten soon started to scream as he too noticed the disturbing image.

"Dakota... those shadows you... were talking about... what... did they look like?" June asked.

"Umm...why?" I asked.

Shandra pointed towards the frame Jessica and Brianna were showcased in. Jessica was the only one visible since Brianna stayed in the background doing various things while listening in on the conversation. This time, rather than a shot of a living room full of comfy leather chairs and a large flat screen television, a black mist could be seen engulfing the room.

"Jess..." I said.

"Guys, what is going on?" she asked.

"Turn around..." I told her.

Almost without any hint that something was happening, she turned her head instantly. At first, she acted like nothing was going on, but she immediately flipped back around screaming at the top of her lungs. When she jumped, she moved just enough out of frame so the rest of us could see what was happening. Micasia and Shandra soon followed suit, but they muffled themselves by smacking their hands against their mouths. Marcus and I should've tucked them into our arms to block out the horrific sight, but we froze in place.

In the dead center of the mists, Brianna stood with her arms in the air and the palms of her hands facing forward. Her skin was pale and her body shaking. Blood was pouring from her eyes, ears, and mouth. Fresh blood and pieces of skin covered her hands like gloves. The muscles underneath her skin were black and rotten. Her bones from her hands down to the bend of her elbows had scratches running completely down them. I tried to say something, but as the words materialized in my mouth, Brianna's body shakes became stronger. She opened her lips and the screams of eighteen different voices pierced all of our ears and fried the video feed on their computer. Jessica could still be heard screaming while sounds of various objects smashing against each other also pleaded for help. The audio quickly faded out as several voices began taunting Jessica.

Everyone else in the conversation fell dead silent. The full reality of the situation was right in front of us. The Shadow Army was going to kill us, all of us.

"One down, six to go," whispered my Shadow Hunter.

*'Where is the Light Hunter?'* I telepathically asked him.

*'He is trying to help Jessica get out. Brianna is dead and something took over her body. Whatever is inside her is powerful, and a fucking lunatic,'* he answered.

*'Is that how she clawed opened her own fucking arms?'*

*'Yep. Just after she ripped out her own eyeball and ate it.'*

*'Jesus Christ, what in the Hell is going on?'*

*'Demons have always had a taste for pretty young girls, you know this. But what happened with Brianna... that is something stronger than Satan himself. Something that hasn't been around for a few thousand years.'*

*'Damn it, what should I do?'*

*'Send the video to your friends, along with copies of the sketch you did of the amulet. They need to print it off and get the perimeters set in as soon as possible.'*

*'Will it be enough?'*

*'For them, it will be enough to keep them safe. As for your girl, she is going to need a little something extra to help her.'*

*'What is that?'*

My Shadow Hunter quickly faded away before answering the question. Under the circumstances, I fig-

ured he was trying to help Light Hunter with getting Jessica away from whatever took over Brianna. Maybe I could figure out what he was going to suggest to me in order to protect Shandra, I don't know. All I did know, is that the rest of us shouldn't stand around when we could prevent more deaths. Everyone had tear soaked faces at possibly they were going to be next to die.

"Listen, guys, we need to do everything we can to avoid more of what just happened. I am going to send out the emails, watch them. There will also be a sketch of the amulet also attached so that way you can just print it out and set up the perimeter even quicker. As for Jessica, keep positive thoughts focused on her and she will make it through," I said.

"What about Brianna?" asked June.

My eyes nearly fell from my skull as I tried to deliver the news. Brianna may have been my ex-girlfriend, but she was still an important person in my life. The first person, other than Cherry, to inspire me to break free from my personal Hell, was now the very vessel of something even Hell is frightened of. Her body was too mangled and destroyed for most people to survive. She...

"Brianna is dead," I said.

Marcus's head dropped when I said it. Micasia looked like she was a few seconds away from puking her guts out. June cringed as the salt from her crying leaked into the wounds left by her frightened kitten. Shandra was frozen still. We all accepted that death

was a natural part of life, and we went on our daily lives trying to fill them with as much excitement and success as we could before our time. But we never imagined that it would be taken from us. We knew the horrors of an unexpected death, through car accidents to suicides, but a new type of fear emerged from knowing that it was a simple outcome. Be it cancer, or the death of a loved one in the military, we knew the hurt all too well. But in that moment, an even greater fear overcame us. The suspense that we were being picked off like flies made things all too real.

"I love you all," whispered Shandra.

"Love you too," everyone else whispered in unison.

I know it sounds like a horror movie cliché, but it is the truth. Before we all cut off the video conference, we said what very well could be the last goodbye we ever said to each other. It felt horrible knowing that Jessica and Brianna didn't get a chance to embrace it. We were all friends united by tragedy, by a common path that formed when our worlds met, which immediately made us all family. Now we were being hunted as one.

"Shandra," I whispered, "Are you okay?"

She shook her head as her lips began to quiver with salty tears slowly coating them in diamond mirrors. There was no need for her to speak, I knew everything she was going to say. Her mind focused on the possibility her death was next, perhaps more frightening was how she was going to die. Only one thing could help

ease her mind, something that Jessica and Brianna had a hand at arranging.

"Listen, there is something I want to show you," I whispered.

"What Dakota?" she growled, "What is so fucking important?"

"There is something that Jessica and Brianna wanted me to give you," I said, "I think it will help you feel better."

"What?"

I stood up and took her hand to lead her up the stairs. Her palms felt weak and fragile as we took each step, eventually leading ourselves into our bedroom. I picked up her hand and gave it a gentle kiss before letting it drop to her side. The look in her eyes showed me that she was confused about what I was doing, something I hoped would happen.

"Please, close your eyes," I told her.

She took both of her hands to cover her face. I could hear her mumble under her breath the words, "What is he doing?" I didn't say anything while her eyes were covered and tried my best to keep every part of my body silent while I moved through the room. As I walked over to my closet, a gentle breeze opened up the door just enough for me to grab the tiny black box sitting on the top shelf that held Shandra's gift inside. My fingers shivered as they wrapped themselves in the smooth fabric that encased the box. They knew how important this moment was, and shook at the suspense



of what could happen. I took my open hand and used it to close the closet while the box pressed itself against my chest. My heart whispered a little prayer into the box to bless it with love and protection. I slowly walked back over to Shandra and got down on one knee.

"Shandra," I whispered, "Will you marry me?"

Her hands slowly fell from her face. Her jaw dropped as the fabric of box came into view. I cracked open the box to reveal a circular cut, four karat diamond engagement ring with a silver band engraved with the words, "Your Wings Carry Me to Serenity," on the outer band. More tears sprang from her eyes, ones that actually sparkled with delight. Her mind became overwhelmed with emotions, she wasn't sure what to think or say.

"Da...kota... I don't know what to say," she whispered.

"Just say what is in your heart," I told her.

I tried to tune into her mind to see where her words might lead her, but everything was a blank. Her mind couldn't come up with anything to say.

"I had help from Brianna, Jessica, and your mother to make sure it was perfect," I told her, "I was planning to on giving it to you Christmas day but I figured under the circumstances they would want to make sure I gave it to you before it was too late."

Two strange blue lights appeared on both sides of the ring box. They slowly grew into two separate hands, one bigger than the other. Shandra and I watched as they both rested on the top of the ring. The diamond

welcomed their presence as if they were two angels who came to bless the ring. As the diamond reflected the lights from the angel hands, the identities of the two visitors became known. One was our beautiful daughter, Olivia, with a bright smile on her face accompanied by her sparkling blue eyes. The other was Brianna with a look on her face that I had never seen before, a look of serenity.

"You two, have a very beautiful daughter," Brianna said.

"Thank you, Aunty Bri," Olivia cheered.

"Brianna," Shandra whispered, "What happened to you?"

"I have made some very horrible mistakes," she answered, "But I am finding a way to make up for them and I thought that Olivia could help me do it since we don't have much time."

Olivia excitedly shook her head in agreement. Whatever she and Brianna had planned to do was obviously very special to her. The light from the diamond grew brighter as they whispered a chant of sorts under their breaths. The room quickly felt lighter, as if we had entered the heavens and soared through the skies. Shandra and I couldn't help but feel at peace and free. As the lights continued, another voice appeared one that I always tried to listen for.

"You've done a good job, DT," said my grandfather.

"Thanks, grandpa," I whispered.

As soon as I thanked my grandfather, the lights from the diamond grew so bright it had blinded Shandra and I. Once the shine faded out, and in the time it took for our eyes to adjust, the spirits that came to see our engagement was gone. I guess they really didn't have much time to visit. I smiled as I looked towards Shandra, still in shock from the whole ordeal, just to see what her next move was going to be. In a matter of moments, my questions were answered as Shandra nearly tackled me while shaking her head up and down.

"Yes, yes I will marry you!" she cried out.

I shut the ring box as I wrapped my arms around her and lifted her up. As she lifted legs and moved her lips onto mine, I felt our hearts beating against each other. She deserved this and so much more that I wasn't able to give her. But that night, I slowly tried everything I could think of ways to bring what she deserved to live.

"Thank you, for everything," Shandra whispered.

"As long as our hearts sing to the same tune, I will always find a way to travel through any world to make you happy," I whispered back.

As she planted a final kiss on my lips, she dropped from my body and reached for the ring box. She took it from my fingers and slowly opened the box up so she could get an even closer at her ring. Something about the look in her eye told me that she felt as if she was in a dream-like state. She didn't believe anything that was happening. One moment she goes from mourning the very tragic death of her closest friends, and the next

she was engaged to the person who protected her the most.

To help her realize that the last few moments were, in fact, a reality, I took the ring and gently slid it onto her finger. Her whole hand quivered with excitement as the ring settled on her skin.

"How does it feel?" I asked her.

"It feels good," she answered.

"Good," I said, "Now you should probably get ready. I am sure your mom will want to see how the ring looks on you."

"You're right. Thank you. I just wish Jessica could see it."

I leaned in and gave her a kiss on the cheek and whispered, "Don't worry she will. We will make it through this."

"How do you know? How can anyone know?"

"I know because I can see the future, remember?"

"And what do you see?"

I walked towards the doorway of my bedroom of turned my head to face her. There was a future I saw with her.

"I saw you, me, and Olivia under the brightest of stars I have ever seen," I answered.

"That's beautiful," she whispered.

I nodded my head and slowly walked down the stairs. One final thought popped up about the future I saw with me and Shandra in it.

“While our bodies are bloody and burning,” I whispered under my breath.

As I hurried down the stairs to focus on the email, I could hear Shandra packing her things. Our dresser drawers slowly opened and closed as she carefully placed her stuff into her bags. I couldn't help but wonder if she was worried about breaking the ring. It didn't really matter, I trusted that she would take care of the ring.

While I listened to Shandra mumble under her breath about her plans for her holiday with her mom, I prepared the email for the others so they would be prepared. I don't know why Brianna was the first one to die, maybe what was in the email would help prevent any more casualties. There was no way I could tell that sending out that email actually did any good. I just had to trust that somehow, in SOME way, it did some good.

In the message, I simply let my heart take over just so I could put together something meaningful. If more people I cared about were going to die, it was best that we all ended things on a good note. But for some reason, I felt as if the email should be written to a much wider audience

“To All,

“If you are able to read this then you are probably aware of the chaos that emerged on December 21st of the year 2012. Whatever is the reason you see this message is not important, but what you do with the remaining time in your life is. There will come a time

in each and every one of our lives where we will leave the limitations of our physical bodies to rejoin the great fabric of the cosmos. In the coming days, many of whom were originally meant to live on will have the chance to leave this life and move on to the next, be it by their own choice or by the hands of another. Many have lived their lives wondering if they would be remembered or missed if they ever suddenly disappeared. Many are met with the false answer that they will be forgotten, that they will not be missed, but this is not true. The cosmos will remember, for it has no sense of age. The spirits we see roaming the night ARE those the cosmos chose to remember, and since we are a part of the cosmos, the spirits are ones we chose to remember. We will all be given the chance to live on, either by fighting in our physical bodies or as spirits who watch over their loved ones.

“That is why... over the span of what remains of our lives I believe it is best for everyone to do the following things.

1. Love those close to you more, they may not be around when this is over
2. Forget the conflicts that have corrupted your life, there will be new battles much greater than those
3. Teach others the skills and knowledge you have learned in your lifetime, for the new generations that will come into the picture
4. When you have the time, use your knowledge and your memories to write your story. Leave a lasting

marker about your struggles and how you survived the coming battle. Our names may soon be etched into tombstones, but if we leave something permanent for the future generations as a warning for when history tries to repeat itself.

“Follow these guidelines and we'll have time to restart the new world if enough of humanity survives. I do hope to meet you all in the New World.

“To the other Paranormal Raiders,

“I am thankful for all of you. Every single one of you has brought your own joys into my life as we became The Ones Who Walk All Worlds, and now our ties to each other and all we accomplished are going to be tested. I know not to what extent or what these tests will entail, but I do know it will be too much to handle. Stay close to one another and only trust those willing to press their backs against yours.

“Attached is a video and a few documents that will help you make it through the coming fight. By the way, to get a start on the New World, below are some special messages for all of you.

“Shandra: Thank you for everything. For the joy, for the friendship, for your love, for the memories, and for the future that is unfolding before us. I am forever grateful for everything we shared these last few years, and I hope for many more years. I am also glad to soon call you my wife.

“Jessica: After seeing what happened with Brianna, I hope you are able to see this. You have been one of my

closest friends and I cannot thank you enough for the times you helped me. You always have been intelligent and not afraid to pursue whatever it is you wanted.

“June: I know that we haven't known each other for a long time. But I am glad we have become friends. I do hope that you and Jessica make it together. You two seem to make each other very happy and hope it all works out.

“Micasia: I have always loved how you weren't afraid to stand out. You were always the type to try out whatever popped into your head and actually was good. I always admired that about you, and the fact you were brave enough to take on Marcus.

“Marcus: I am glad to have known you for these many years. What was grade was it when we met? 6th grade, right? No matter how long we have known each other, I have come to know you as a brother. And I would like to ask you to be my best man.

“Good luck to you all.

“Dakota”

I attached the video and photos of the amulet to the email before sending it. This email was the only way to guide anyone to right paths of survival. I wasn't going to start marching through the streets shouting random bull shit. I wasn't going to start a picket line. None of that. The only thing I could leave some sort of instructions IF any of us survived. The most important step I felt was necessary to follow was the fourth one in the message. Everyone, who is able, needs to find some



method to document everything that happens to them when the battle begins. Too much chaos would emerge for anyone to keep an accurate written description of events without dealing with interruptions that could very well end their life, as I have faced while putting this book together. But truth is, the things I have seen alone are probably burned so deeply into my mind that I would still remember it all in precise detail if I ever faced a condition such as Alzheimer's.

As Shandra came down the stairs, I sent the email to the remaining members of my team. I heard a hitch pitched ring tone come from the stairs, which made Shandra stop half way down the stairs. Her phone quickly got the email, with very little delay, and it was obvious that she took the time to read it.

"What you said is amazing, Dakota," Shandra said.

"You know I mean every part of it," I told her.

She came down the stairs to face me with a luggage bag in hand. Her eyes were filled with so many emotions about the coming days, most are filled with fear. I walked up to her to wrap my arms around her body. She dropped her bag and locked her arms around me.

"I'm scared," she whispered.

"I know. I am too," I told her.

"Then how can you be sure we will make it?"

"Shandra, fear is nothing more than a barrier the mind dares you to overcome. There are only three options you are given; to climb over, to work around, or to break through. There are no ridges to grasp and the

fight will come from the sky so there no point to fly. The fight will spread to everywhere around the world, so it will be impossible to dance around. Our only option is to break through it."

"But how?" she whispered in her mind.

"We will find a way when it comes," I told her.

Shandra's arms slowly slid down my body and dropped to her sides. I gave her one last squeeze before letting her go and grabbed her bags. Everything I needed for the day was in my pockets. As for my weapon, I could make it appear from mid-air at any moment.

"Should we get out of here?" I asked.

"Yeah, I want my mom to see the ring!" she joked.

"I'm glad, it looks good on you."

I lead Shandra out to the car and gently placed her bags in the back seat as she got in on the passenger side. I wouldn't have a problem with her driving, but so much was on her mind she wouldn't be able to focus on the reckless drivers that tend to come out during the winter months. But to be honest, not even cars with sensors so strong they can map the movements of electrons could be prepared.

As we drove away, I could sense that Shandra was still unsettled about what was next for us. Her hands constantly shifted. Her mouth kept opening and closing like she was trying to say something, but the words couldn't match her lips.

"So, what is it that you and Jerry are going to do?" she asked.

"Mostly just keep an eye on things around town," I answered, "Why do you ask?"

"No reason. I was just wondering because you two usually don't get together unless something has already happened."

"You're right," I chuckled, "That does seem to be the pattern."

"I know, so what is going on?"

"Just some patrol work, robberies tend to increase this time of year. Normally there are simply bank robberies and lowlifes who jack toy drives and people's Christmas presents. But the supernatural boost driving the latest bit of insanity may inspire more than punks taking advantage of weak moments. So they are wanting me to come in so I could spot potential targets."

"How are you going to do that?"

"It won't be hard to spot any patterns, but for security reasons, I cannot go into any specifics about how it will all work."

"So you're saying that you, yourself, aren't sure of how it is all going to work out?"

I took a deep breath, she caught me. "The truth is so much is in the wind right now no one knows," I told her.

"Figures. So what if something happens?"

The tone in Shandra's voice was different. Rather than a worried soul trying to piece together a broken

future, she sounded like someone prying for information. I know it sounds weird, but she almost sounded like she was in a criminal investigation show as a character wearing a wire in order to unravel the schemes of some master criminal.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

"Yeah, why?" she asked rather confused.

"No reason, you just seem awfully talkative."

"I know, I am just trying to get my mind off of what happened with Brianna. I'm sorry."

I laid my hand on her knee to get her attention. Her mind was splitting in so many ways it would end up creating two completely different personalities if it hadn't happened already.

"Don't be. We both lost a friend, but at least we know she is in a better place," I said.

Shandra simply nodded her head. As her head moved forward, I tried to keep an eye open for any strange markings on her neck. Particularly anything that would resemble anything I had planted in my neck for the Ferri job. Heck, maybe it was still in my neck for all I knew. Seeing that nothing was on her neck that I was able to spot, I simply took a deep breath and continued driving.

Text message tones started to sound off on both cell phones in the car. Shandra quickly reached for her phone and nearly ripped through her messages, trying to find one from Jessica.

"Any from her?" I asked.

"No, just from the others," she answered.

"Damn it, that means she is still fighting."

"How long do you think she can make it?"

"Jessica is very smart, she will find a way. Something tells me that she is trying to find a way back here to see us."

Shandra stares at me confused. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"This is home to her, despite all of the hell she had seen. It is where her family is, the people that would do everything in their power to keep her safe."

"It's where we obviously build our family."

Olivia appeared in the backseat, kicking her legs back and forth as if she was in her own world. Somehow, seeing her like that was relaxing. Olivia was the light at the end of the tunnel and the trumpet sounding off the end of the war.

"We're here," she whispered before fading away.

"I guess someone is already plotting visits to Grandma's house," I joked.

"She is going to be a little terrorist when she gets old enough," Shandra laughed.

"To be honest, I can't wait to actually hold her."

A gentle smile grew on Shandra's face. She would always tell me about how worried the guy she would end up being with was going to be the same monster as her step father. I'd guess her hearing what I had to say about Olivia was enough confirmation for her to realize the exact opposite was happening.

"Well, we should probably go in. Mom is wanting to see you before you go out with Jerry," Shandra said.

"Okay, that's probably a good idea," I said, "I could probably get a better look at how she is doing."

"The doctor said the tumor is shrinking and haven't found any more, so hopefully you won't see anything else."

Shandra and I were referencing the time I accidentally used my psychic abilities to spot the very tumor which snapped my grandfather's spine when he died. Ever since she found out her mother had cancer, she tried persuading me to keep an eye on the situation through the same methods. Originally she was hesitant, feeling that because of my grandfather I wouldn't do it. Eventually, she convinced me to monitor her mother's condition, just in case I could spot something the doctors couldn't. Needless to say, the doctors and I both reached the same conclusion. Shandra's mom, Ramona, was getting better. She had lost a lot of weight but somehow kept herself from becoming a skeleton. It was quite impressive.

As Shandra and I got out of the car, Ramona stepped outside the house to greet us. She was holding a large plate full of fresh brownies. The house she was living in wasn't the same one as when I first came to Shandra's rescue. The first house was too damaged from a termite infestation to be saved, forcing her to move to another house. Thankfully her landlord had just opened a two bedroom, single story house just

down the block and offered to let her live there for reduced monthly rent payment. Even though it wasn't far, it seemed to be enough to help Ramona move on from her abusive ex-husband.

"Come on, you two," she yelled, "These are still hot."

"Mom, you have to see the ring Dakota got for me!" Shandra shouted.

Shandra hurried up to her mother to greet her with a large hug before showing off the ring. I went to the back seat and grabbed Shandra's bags before I greeted my soon to be mother-in-law. As I shut the doors to my car and started walking towards the front door of the house, the smell of the brownies greeted my nose with a rich, chocolate welcome.

"Those smell delicious, Ramona," I laughed.

"Come on in and have a few then, Dakota!"

I couldn't help but giggle at the enthusiasm she showed. Again, it was very impressive for her to be like that in the condition she was in, somewhat admirable as well. As I walked inside the house, I could feel the warmth of love and brownies counter the winter cold. The thought of my future wife and mother-in-law in the same building and everybody simply being happy was a sign of hope for a future.

I hurried into Shandra's room and placed her bags on her bed before I joined Shandra and Ramona in the living room for some delicious brownies. The two sat together on an old green couch in the living room while chatting about romance and just about any other sub-

ject that came to mind as I took a seat on a nearby recliner. We all faced a wooden coffee table where the brownies laid. I grabbed a brownie from the top of the pile and took my first bite.

"So Dakota, what is the plan for you and Shandra?" Ramona asked.

"Mom!" Shandra squealed.

"What? I would like to know when the wedding is!"

"I told you that we didn't have a chance to discuss any details."

"Is it because of what happened to Brianna?"

"Well, yes," I answered.

"Oh, okay. I figured that because of the drugs she was using she would start acting weird. But not like what Shandra told me," Ramona said.

My face froze. I didn't know about Brianna using any sort of drugs. In most cases, any sort of paranormal "events" stirred up the phenomena would be traced to a drug-induced hallucination. Yet little do most people know, in very rare cases, actual demons come out to play with drug addicts simply because they know their presence would be excused. If the drugs were anything serious, it could have been why Brianna was the first to die.

"What drugs?" I asked nearly clenching my fists.

"Just some sleeping pills," Shandra answered, 'And heavy doses of refined meth.'

'WHAT?! Why didn't you tell me?!'



'Cause I know you would freak out, and Brianna made Jessica and I swear not to tell you while she was trying to get better.'

'She was trying to get better? Shandra, those drugs could be why Brianna was the first to die!'

'I'm sorry! She was getting better, I swear!'

My phone rang with Jerry's name flashing on the screen.

"I'd better answer this," I said, "It could be about tonight."

"What's going on?" Ramona asked.

"Dakota is helping some cops with the holiday crazies," Shandra answered.

I rose from my seat and took a step outside to handle the phone call. Being that it was police business, even though I wasn't an official cop, it was protocol to keep things within a loop. The people on the outside needed to stay out unless it was one of their loved ones involved. Even in those circumstances, there is only so much that can be said.

"Hey, what's up?" I said.

"I need you out earlier, the nut jobs are already out and about," Jerry said, "We've already had three domestics and seven break-ins."

"Jesus Christ, what the hell is wrong with people?"

"Hey, if there weren't psychos and stupid people, a majority of the world would be out of a job."

"Too true. Anyway let me finish up with Shandra and I'll be out and about."

"Hurry up. There isn't much time."

Jerry hung up the phone right as some loud bangs and cracks started to grow in the background. He was getting his own slice of hell being that he was one of the few actually standing in the way of an all out brawl. Right as I was tucking away my cell phone, Shandra came outside to join me.

"Hey, can we talk?" she asked.

"Sure, what's up?" I asked her.

"Are you mad? About Brianna?"

"No, I'm not mad Shandra. There is nothing that can be done about it now."

"Then why do you keep acting like that?"

"I'm sorry! Shandra, Brianna is dead because of those drugs. If I knew about it, I could have done something to save her!"

"Don't yell at me! Don't you think I feel bad enough already! Brianna scratched so deep into her skin that you could see her bones! She is dead because of me!"

Shandra burst into tears. Her face and eyes burst into an array of shiny reds. She buried her face into her palms as her tears flowed through the folds of her skin. Her gasps for air nearly sounded like she was drowning. She knew I hated to see her like that, so I immediately wrapped my arms around her. I couldn't let us break out into a fight like what happened when Jessica was taken.

"You're wrong," I whispered, "You're not the reason she is dead. She made the choice to use the drugs."

"No, I'm the reason. I am the one that introduced her to the guy that got her hooked. She started about a week after Jessica disappeared. At first, she just said it was pure weed, something to help with her eating disorder and the high blood pressure. Then one day Jess caught her snorting something that looked like black crystals. We figured that it was some sort of meth."

"Shandra, listen to me."

Her cries settled so she could hear me clearly. Her pulse radiated through her body.

"Brianna made the choice, and now she paid the price. What happened, you had nothing to do with."

'How can you be sure?' she mentally asked.

'Because I know you. I know, that you aren't capable of hurting anyone unless you absolutely had to,' I answered, 'Now please, be strong for me tonight. When this is over... I honestly can't tell who will be left.'

Shandra lifted her head so her eyes would meet mine. She finally realized that I was just as scared as she was, yet I was still willing to fight.

"Then why are you willing to fight?" she asked me.

"For this," I whispered.

I leaned into her to grab one last kiss for the evening before I went off to war. She needed this as a reminder of why I was doing this, why I did anything to make our lives better. I did it all... for her. Not to become some war hero. Not to have my name engraved on a stone monument. Not to have a statue of my likeness erect in the town I called home. But to protect her. To en-

sure that she would have a good life, one where none of her demons would be able to taunt her. One where the demons of any of our loved ones would no longer. Jessica, June, Shandra, Micasia, Marcus, Me, Brianna and even Olivia would all be free. Was that too much of a dream to accomplish? To simply help the ones I've come to know as family lead good lives.

As Shandra's lips pulled away from mine, I readied myself for the one last breath of commitment to the night's activities.

"I'll call you when I am done tonight," I told her.

"Okay," she whispered, "Is this just for tonight?"

"For now. Everyone is thinking that it will tone down after tonight."

"Okay. I love you."

"Love you too. Please call me if anything happens."

"Okay."

Through one of the windows, near the front door, I waved inside to Ramona as I started to walk away. She waved back as her daughter stood by the door to watch as I drove away. As I started the engine in my car, she blew a kiss towards me just before she walked into the house.

When the tires met the road as I drove away, I pulled out my phone to send Jerry a text message to let him know that I was finally on my way.

Me: I just finished with Shandra.

Jerry: Good. Meet with me in the parking lot at the bar, across the street from the old dollar store.

Me: I thought that we were meeting downtown, near the old fountain?

Jerry: Downtown has been compromised. National Guard is containing some rioters in that area.

Me: When in the HELL was the National Guard called in?

Jerry: All military units still stationed here in the states were put on standby thanks to Ford.

Me: Should we be meaning him over text messages?

Jerry: Hell is breaking free as we speak, Dakota. The last thing people are worried about is who is running the only lines of defense. People are already thinking that martial law was declared.

Me: Has it?

Jerry: Not yet officially.

Me: So what happens if when it is declared?

Jerry: That will probably be better answered when you get your ass over here

Me: Got it. I'll be there in ten minutes.

Jerry: Make it five.

My Shadow and Light Hunters appeared in the backseat right as Jerry's last text came through. I glanced at them both through the rear-view mirror.

"About time you two showed up," I said.

"We told Ford that you would likely need some backup for this run," grunted Shadow.

"So do you need us to do anything?" asked Light.

"Stall all vehicles, except for police and military. But focus more on ones that look like they are causing trou-

ble, just so we can give our friends in uniform a hand with any troublemakers. I need to meet with Jerry before we hunt tonight," I ordered.

Without question, they both flew out of the roof of my car and began shooting lightning towards specific targets. The bolts, each in the sources respected color, acted like electromagnetic pulses in order to fry the wiring inside of the vehicles. If the people inside the vehicle contributed to the mess, their car wouldn't work to help the police catch them. If the people on the inside were running for help or shelter, they were left alone by my Hunters. Too many innocent people were already harmed or killed in the confusion. As I continued to drive through the streets, I turned on the radio to listen just to get a better idea of how widespread the insanity was becoming.

In San Francisco, at least four hundred were estimated to have leaped to their deaths off of the Golden Gate Bridge. Chicago was reporting countless fires caused by arsonists. Several parts of Manhattan were quarantined off by military officials due to extreme rioting. In Denver, several children were caught in the crossfire of their parents fending off home invaders. Several inmates were breaking free from prisons all over the country, some even making it out of the highly secured facilities. In Alaska, several mothers killed their youngest children and threw the bodies in nearly frozen rivers to "preserve their innocence." Many agencies within Texas were reporting parents slicing open

their own throats in front of their own children, expecting them to do the same.

Those were just the reports I did hear, before one announcer finally came across with the words, "President Slade will now be making an announcement on behalf of all military and law enforcement agencies across the nation, in response to the recent violence that has swept every city in America. We now go live to the President's bunker in Washington."

It felt as if the entire world grew silent as the sound of the radio shifted over to the President before he would make his announcement. I couldn't hear the breaking windows or the screaming children that were laying on the sidewalks as I drove around. A man on the radio took a deep breath before speaking. My mind grew heavy as it recorded every word and burned it all into its deepest portions.

"My Fellow Americans,

"Within the last few hours, violence unlike anything ever seen before has corrupted the fabric of this great nation. In fact, as I am making this address, I am receiving reports that every nation is reporting great violence and bloodshed amongst their people. It is because of these recent events that I, President Author S. Slade alongside many other national leaders, are declaring a state of martial law effective immediately. Here in the United States, our military has prepared for such a widespread occasion by setting up various facilities around the nation to help the American People. Several

military units will be traveling through the , in areas deemed safe by the personnel in charge of assigned districts, provide supplies to help rebuild all that will be lost and to help those lucky enough to survive. Until then we ask that everyone to stay indoors. Do not go outside unless you feel it be absolutely necessary. Please help provide shelter to anyone who may be caught outside and find ways to defend yourselves and your loved ones. If you are caught outside, please follow the orders of any law enforcement or military personnel as they are permitted to use deadly force if they deem it necessary. Do not make any attempt to confront the men and women in uniform as they are only trying to help keep this country safe for all people.

“I do not wish to make this announcement, but given the magnitude of the situation and the estimated loss of life already, I had no choice. I do wish that everyone makes it out of this horrendous occasion alive and well so we may rebuild the world into a better place.

“Within the next half hour, a list of rules essential to survival will be broadcast on all channels, through all means of communication. It is recommended that everyone not involved in helping our brothers and sisters across the globe restore the fabric of peace follow these rules in order to reduce the casualties that we will face.

“Good luck to everyone. I do pray for all to make it out of this alive. So God bless you. And God bless America.”



"Fucking shit!" I shouted, "It's too late."

No, it wasn't too late. I knew that it was coming. I had to fight. I was entrusted to help protect the people, and the president of the United States himself confirmed that everyone was going to need me more than ever. The first step to salvation was to meet with Jerry, so I slammed the gas pedal into the floorboard.

I was ready for war.



## Chapter 6

# Dawn of the War

I made to the bar within the time frame Jerry ordered. It was surprisingly easy to get through the army convoys that quickly filled the streets. Days like that were easily the makings of conspiracy theories; all hell breaks loose thanks to some form of government mind control then the President initiates martial law to capture every living soul in the country. December 21, 2012, became that day.

As I pulled into the parking lot, Jerry was standing next to a large SUV. His car was parked right next to it. The SUV was meant for attack dogs, but it held some supplies for my car. When I got out of the car, I could hear fighting come from inside the bar. The other police officers at the meeting drew their weapons and stormed the building.

"It's about time you got here," he said, "Having trouble with traffic?"

"Oh, you know, them Humvees tend to run a little slow," I joked.

"I am surprised the military popped out so quickly. Then again, nothing like this has ever happened before."

"No, not in the memories printed in textbooks. The shit we are about to see will be too much for history books to document."

"How can you be sure?"

"It's obvious dude. Just wait, things are going to happen nobody would have ever expected," I told him, "So what is it that we need to do here?"

"Mostly getting you and your car rigged up," he answered.

"What do you mean?"

"Come look."

Jerry popped open the back of the SUV to reveal a series of lights and radios meant just for me. The lights were special LED displays that mounted on the front and back windshields of my car, to let everyone know I was assigned authority over the situation. There were two radio sets next to the lights, one for the car and one for me to carry around.

"You gonna help me install these?" I asked Jerry.

"Only cause we are short on time, thankfully these are easy install," he answered.

Before paying any attention to the dash lights, I went straight for the handheld radio and turned it on. Some military officers were chatting about unidenti-

fied aircraft coming in from the south and were preparing to shoot it down.

"Just great, the last fucking thing we need is downed aircraft," Jerry grunted.

"Something tells me it ain't going to be a jet or helo that will come crashing down."

"Shut it," Jerry said, "It's only going to be true if you say it."

"We have to be prepared Jerry," I joked, "Nothing is ever going to be the same after this."

"I know," he sighed, "Help me get these things to your car, they're a little heavy."

"Sure."

I lifted the larger set of lights and took them to my car. The smaller set that Jerry held was meant for the back seat. Mounting the lights was easy thanks to a couple transparent suction cups. The main unit was powered by a switch that plugged directly into the cigarette lighter. The other ran off of a couple D batteries. Between the two, an infrared signal helped synchronize the lighting so the patterns would alternate.

"What about the car radio?" I asked Jerry.

"Just slide it into the gap in your console. It will fit tight enough to stick as long as you don't get into a wreck," he answered.

"It's going to be hard not to crash in this fucking mess."

"But you have those alter egos of yours that can jam electrical circuits."

"It won't take much to get overwhelmed, even with a supernatural assist."

"Whatever. Just hurry up and start the car so we can test the lights."

"Alright, alright!"

I adjusted myself in the front seat so I could start my car and check out the new lights by flipping the switch. Bright green and amber lights danced off of nearby buildings.

"What's with the colors?" I asked him.

"In most cases, those are for security agencies. But now, they are to mark special civilians granted police and sometimes military permissions."

"So it marks me as a legal vigilante."

"Yeah, technically you already were considered a legal vigilante, but now you have the gear to look the part."

Three large explosions rang from the sky. Jerry and I both looked up to see a large ball of fire quickly crashing down. The flames shifted from shades of red and orange to waves of green and blue. As the craft came closer to its impact, I could make out that it was a metallic disc with several large holes blasted through it. The front of the disc lifted itself as if something on the inside of it was trying to ease the landing. Somebody was on that craft trying not to die.

Within nanoseconds, the metallic craft crashed landed about a hundred yards from where the bar stood, shaking the entire ground.

"What the Hell was that?!" Jerry screamed.

"Roswell!" I told him.

"Shit!" Jerry screamed as he hurried into his cruiser and bolted towards the crash site. With the police radio in hand, I slammed it into the gap in my dashboard just underneath the radio and followed Jerry. The lights in our rigs were perfectly in sync as we hurried to meet with the crash site. We knew the chaos would drive extraterrestrial parties to intervene, but not like this. I can say with confidence that Jerry and I thought of the same questions as we came closer to the crash site. What was in the craft? Who the hell shot it down? Were there more just like this coming?

As our tires skid into the pavement, while our feet slammed into the breaks, we came close to finding our answers. Jerry drew out his forty-five caliber pistol and clicked off the safety. I manifested the Ashtarian into an assault rifle and joined his side as we both slowly approached the crashed spacecraft just thirty feet from us. Several growls comprised of a series of rapid deep clicks grew louder as we got closer.

"Those are some pissed off lizards," Jerry joked.

"Can you blame them?" I asked, "They just got shot down."

A panel on the ship broke off as something short and covered in pale green scales crawled its way out with a strange neon, blue ball in its right hand. It growled and acted as if it was cursing at us. Jerry stiffened his arm and slid his finger on the trigger.

"Don't shoot, we don't need to aggravate it," I whispered.

Nation Guard rigs approached us with assault rifles and machine guns cocked and ready. The being from the craft started to panic, continuing to scream in its own language. As the creature's clicks and squeals grew louder and the pitch became higher, the ball in its hand sprouted a bright green glow. An electric scream emerged that drew out all other sounds in the world. The pitch was filled with tiny daggers that drew blood out of every ear that heard it. My mind tried screaming as loud as it could to warn my body about what was happening. I turned to face the Guardsmen that gathered behind Jerry and me, who also was losing blood, and started swinging my arms to signal to them that they need to turn back.

"Get back!" I screamed, "It's a bomb!"

Jerry fired the first shot, killing the being as the bullet buried its way between the creature's eyes. The shot made the screaming ball fall into the downed spaceship as it detonated. Somehow, the craft was able to contain the blast, and only sent metal and scaly flesh flying. The pieces somehow didn't hit Jerry's patrol car or my personal vehicle, but it did leave a mark on the National Guard rigs. While the soldiers slowly regained enough consciousness to realize what happened, Jerry and I used the opportunity to escape in the confusion. Because we weren't military officers, the chances of us going through severe "debriefings" were high. There was



still work to be done, so Jerry and I parted ways and finally dived into the original plan.

The plan was to, metaphorically, sanction off areas of town for officers to patrol. There were no defining borders to allow for extra eyes in problem areas, but even then there were gaps in marked areas. Because it was close to the holidays, each officer was asked to pick three to five locations to define their patrol areas. As predicted, many of the officers chose areas of importance to them. Most of them picked special areas that would cover their houses as well as the homes of their loved ones, favorite hangout spots, their kid's school, and maybe places where their buddies worked. Personally, I kept my patrol area so I could an eye on my place and Shandra while also putting some targets on some sick fucks that have been getting too close to kids.

In most cases, cops would lose authority in martial law, but in this case, a very different plan was in place. Police officers, and volunteers such as myself, would serve as the first wave of the cleanup. While we were out on patrol, we were given full authority to neutralize any threats we saw fit. It was emphasized that we kept our targets alive, but we weren't going to be punished if things went south. After we were done with any targets, we were to draw special marks on anything nearby to indicate what the targets were guilty of by using a series of glowing markers that were impossible to get rid of.

A crack was to indicate vandalism. A knife was to indicate murder. A hand was to indicate domestic violence. A thick, horizontal stripe was to show a sex-related incident. A large sack was to show robbery. Arson was to be shown by a single flame. In the event children were involved, we were supposed to add the number eighteen with a downward facing arrow right next to it. "Extra special," treatment was given to those morons. To prevent the wrong people from being accused and hauled away, we utilized the same markers to draw targets on the heads of those we confronted. If you weren't marked, you were safe.

All of the targets which managed to stay in stable enough condition were bundled together like cattle to be shipped to work camps. Those injured or made ill due to their marks are shipped to special hospital wards for treatment using experimental practices. The dead were bagged up and burned into ash. Those with no marks had a choice, either stay where they are to fend for themselves or to enter special facilities for housing. The innocent often stayed inside their homes unless their homes were too dangerous or hazardous to live in.

As the hours went by I utilized every resource I could think of to take down my marks. Since the Ashtarian could shift into anything that comes to mind, I wasn't given any special tools like the cops in order to get the job done. Rather than using handcuffs of plastic ties, I used the Ashtarian to blast the ones I didn't kill with enough of an electrical charge to para-

lyzed their entire body for forty-eight hours. And rather than drawing on walls with a glowing marker, I used my alien weapon to burn bright green marks thanks to the Ashtarian's partial copper material.

While the battle waged on, I had forgotten about the special guidelines president Slade mentioned in his speech. They were only meant for civilians trying their best to stay out of the chaos, but it was something that every working eye should read. I pulled out my cell phone when the violence seemed to be dying out to check my emails. Needless to say, the President made sure every email that was tied to my phone had a copy of the message.

“To Every American Soul,

“In the following days, martial law will become one of the greatest tests this nation has ever faced, and with these days I each and every one of you these series of favors. I do not expect you all to regard these as the new laws of the land, but I do ask that you follow all of these to the best of your ability. Do these to convince the men and women out on the streets right now that we can rise from these ashes.

“#1 Please stay indoors in this time. If you find yourself in a situation where you are outside, please seek shelter immediately. Several facilities across the nation designed to help the good people survive.

“#2 Please openly help those around you through this tragedy. We are all struggling to make it through

this life in some form, don't be foolish and think you are alone.

"#3 Do not be afraid to reach extreme measures to defend your life and the lives of ones you care about. We have thousands of men and women watching the streets, doing everything to protect everyone, but that doesn't strip you of the right to protect yourself or those around you.

"#4 Do your best to extend kindness to those around you. Forgive those who have done you wrong and forget the reasons behind the battles of your past. But never lose the knowledge you have gained. These will become very desperate times and you will never know who you will need to run to for help, or even who will come to you.

"#5 When you are given a chance to settle down, document everything you remember from these desperate times. Future generations need to know what happened so they can prepare in the event history decides to come full circle.

"I wish to say that I sincerely hope that everyone is able to survive this. And to those who have already passed away, please Rest In Peace and guide those still here to their salvation.

"Godspeed,

"President Arthur S. Slade."

I had to admit, rule five was definitely a good idea. Textbooks of the future would be able to tell about what happened, but they would never be able to ex-

press the true horror. Soldiers journals never make it to the limelight, simply because they are too truthful. If every lasting survivor wrote their truths, there is nothing that can be done to silence it.

I checked the time on my phone. The display read, "8:30 P.M." About once every thirty minutes, all police officers were required to participate in a head count. This was to help keep an eye on the health and overall well being of everyone on patrol. Dispatch would radio out to all of us using a special format. This was to help keep track of everyone for paperwork at the end of the day, but to also make sure everyone was still alive. There were about seventy of us on duty, sixty-five cops, and five legal vigilantes.

"December 20th, 19:30, police roll call," the dispatcher announced.

"Officer Margaret Wilson, status is tired as hell. I'm over at Bel-Air circle checking up on a domestic violence victim from earlier," said one officer

"Officer Damion Taxon, status is a little sore but alright. I'm in the parking lot of the mall, just wrapped up with a couple graffiti artists and about to head over to the bridge. Does anyone else notice that things are starting to calm down?" asked another.

"Officer Brock Ketchum, status is a little hungry. I am heading towards the old shopping center where the drag racers always meet up. And Taxon, yes I have noticed things have slowed down a bit. I hope you just didn't jinx it."

"Officer Levi Hart, status is fine. I just left the low-income housing part of town, surprisingly no one there is raising hell. And just to be honest, how the Hell are these people have low income when there are several Mustangs and Ferraris that are always there?"

"Officer Ashton Smith, status is a little bored. I am going to sneak over to my place to check on some shady figures that have been running around my neighborhood these last few days. And Taxon, drugs are why those fuckers are getting away being listed as low income."

"L.V. Terrace Evans, status is a little worried. I am over by the old radio station, and I keep hearing chatter about unidentified flying objects coming in from the south. Does anyone know what that is about?"

"L.V. Dakota Frandsen," I said into the radio, "Status is taking a breather. I am parked near Pallet Oaks Park. Evans, all I can really say about what is coming in from the South isn't from this world."

More and more cops and legal vigilantes radioed in to simply signal that they are okay. Because of the chaos, we all threw out the traditional alphanumeric codes to use over the airways... we just wanted to let everyone know we were okay.

Chatter about the National Guard and the flying objects coming from the south filled the waves, nearly pushing everyone to a near mental breakdown. I listened carefully to every voice that came on the air, mentally checking off every name I knew that was out

tonight. There was one voice that didn't come across the radio. At first, I waited a few minutes, just in case he was still handling a dangerous situation. But as time moved on, a pit in my stomach appeared. I was afraid that something had gone terribly wrong.

"Dispatch, has officer Tracey Jerome radioed in yet?" I asked.

Seconds passed before she responded, "No Dakota, he hasn't."

"Oh god please no," radioed Evans.

"Chill out guys," said another officer, "He is probably handling a rough target."

"I don't want to take any chances," I growled, "Dispatch, what is officers Jerome's last known location?"

"His cell phone seemed to have died outside his house about ten minutes ago," the dispatcher said.

"Alright, I know it is almost time for the L.V bunch to head home but I am going to check it out. Jerry's sector and mine intersect there so I won't be out of touch," I told her.

"Good luck, Dakota," one of the L.Vs said, "I have a feeling this won't be pretty."

"Thanks, Robert. I'll radio in if I find something."

I slide my phone into my cup holder and slammed on the gas to hurry out to Jerry's house. Something didn't feel right and I needed to make sure that he was okay. This was a dangerous mess and wouldn't take much for blood to spill.

As Jerry's patrol car came into view with the lights still flashing and his driver door still wide open, my tensions were far from easing. I pulled up right behind the cruiser and slammed on the breaks. My tires skid against the road, nearly slamming into Jerry's rear bumper. When my car finally stopped, I switched it over to park and jumped out of my car. I stared at Jerry's house, which was riddled with bullet holes and broken glass. The front windows of his house were broken and blood stains covered every piece. As I got closer to the house, I could see that the bullet holes were actually exit wounds; the shots came from inside. Knowing there was a chance the sick bastards who did this were nearby, I summoned the Ashtarian into the form of an automatic shotgun.

Just underneath the front door, some fresh blood was pooling. There were going to be bodies on the inside, and they were going to be fresh. I opened the door and was immediately welcomed by the smell of fresh flesh and blood. I started to feel sick as I walked through the house and saw the slaughter. Jerry's wife and daughters were lying in pieces all over the house, their torsos still pumping out blood. Their clothes were torn from their bodies. Their eyes still were frozen in fear. I moved around the house, trying to find Jerry. I kept my finger on the trigger of the Ashtarian, just in case the bastards who killed Jerry's family were still around. The brutality and the way the bodies were dis-



membered were a very strong resemblance to the girls killed by Jessica's kidnappers.

When Jessica was kidnapped, I was on a predator's adrenaline high. My heart beat so fast driving my body quicker than my senses could comprehend. I was too distracted to notice the smell of rotting flesh and boiled blood. But when I was scouting Jerry's house, the adrenaline wasn't pumping as fast. I did feel a bit nauseous but was moving just enough to avoid bursting into a mental breakdown like most people would.

I made my way through a narrow hallway that looked like it split off into the separate bedrooms of the one story building. The splash of a tiny drop of water tapping on my shoulder stopped me in my tracks. I looked on the shoulder of my jacket to see that the "water" was awfully thick and had an awfully dark red color. A few more drops felt around me, each one nearly identical in size. I looked up to find the source, to find a headless body nailed into the ceiling. The body was still clothed in a policeman's uniform, with Jerry's tag still on the chest. I dematerialized the Ashtarian and drew out my radio. My pulse began to rise as I was staring at the dead body of a friend.

"OFFICER DOWN!" I screamed, "Officer Tracey Jerome is down! I am at his place. Three confirmed bodies, two of which are completely dismembered. Jerome's body is without a fucking head. Blood is fucking everywhere. These bodies are fresh, whoever did it

could still be close. I need fucking back-up five minutes ago!"

Within minutes, three ambulances were guided to Jerry's house by five police cruisers and a National Guard rig. The guardsmen and cops set up a perimeter to investigate the scene and while trying to look for any sign of the sick fucks that did this. An hour passed, and nothing was found to help the cause. One item was needed in order to move the case anywhere, Jerry's head. It was nowhere to be found. Not in a bush or in a nearby trash bin. Not in a ditch or in a field. The National Guardsmen sent out a message through every channel available, asking for any help locating anyone that was blood soaked or even carrying anything that remotely resembled a severed head. The mess that was made was too spread out, too horrific, for those who did it to not have some sort of trace blood evidence somewhere on their bodies. If they covered their entire bodies, the blood would seep through everything.

I did everything to point out any possible outcomes that could occur if someone did indeed come into contact with the killers, mostly to point out the blood could very well be mistaken for something else, like a mole or even a pressure mark. Too much chaos was coming out of this for anyone, even the most experienced and highly trained, to make accurate assumptions about anything.

At approximately 22:00, three hours into the investigation of the Jerome family slaughter, I received a

phone call that shifted the tides. I was still at Jerry's house, two and a half hours after the legal vigilantes were supposed to go home, trying to help the forensics team find any clues about where to find Jerry's killers when my phone nearly screamed inside my cup holder. The phone display showed Shandra's name alongside a photo of her. I answered the call, only to be welcomed by panicked breathing. I tried to listen in to the background noise as I initiated a conversation.

"Hello?" I asked.

"Dakota," Shandra whispered, "Please help me!"

"Shandra?" I asked, "Babe, what is going on?"

"Three men broke into my house and killed my mom! Two of them started cutting her to pieces while she was still alive. One of them tried to grab me but I grabbed a knife and stabbed him. It didn't faze him!" Shandra cried, "I am locked in my room. All three of them are trying to get in. Please, I need you!"

"I am on my way, please do everything you can to stay alive!"

Shandra screamed once more, killing the phone line. The bastards that killed Jerry were now after Shandra. 'But why?' I asked myself.

'No time to ask questions, Shandra is going to die if we don't move now!' screamed both of my hunters.

And they were both right. There was no time to stand around and ask about what was happening. Ramona was already dead, and Shandra was somehow

making enough of a stand to survive. I had to help her any way I could.

A flashback appeared in my mind's eye as if planted by a spirit, to give me an idea on what I needed to do. It was from a lunch date I had with Shandra when we were dating for about five months at the time. We both sat a table in an old Italian restaurant, talking about how Shandra felt no one was ever truly out there watching over her. Jessica was still mentally recovering from her kidnapping, which was probably what planted the thought in Shandra's mind in the first place. The very words I told her just to ease her mind echoed in my head.

*'Shandra, if anything like what happened to Jessica were to happen to you, I would bring an army to free you. You have my word,'* I said in my mind.

And that was what exactly needed to be done. I yanked on the microphone leading into my car's police radio and took a deep breath. It was time I played my hand.

"I need everyone who has 4286 Madison Street in their sectors to go there now! We have three suspects who have slaughtered a cop and his family and now they are after my fiance. I need as much help as I can get. These sick fucks are armed and extremely dangerous. Possibly using heavy drugs, they have received severe injuries without any response. Use extreme caution but don't be afraid to fill the fuckers full of holes," I shouted over the radio.

"You better be fucking serious," Evans replied.

"Please dude, not now. These guys are connected to the kidnapping and torture of Jessica Summers. We need to get going now!"

I jumped all the way into the car and slammed on the gas. The engine screamed in anger. The war was beginning, the fight was on. Mess with me, I level you. Mess with my friends, I bury you. Mess with my family, never be seen again. Shandra and Jessica were my family and these sickos hurt them both. It was time, for whoever the hell they were to go away.

I hurried past every street and every National Guard post just so I could get to Shandra. Some of them even took the lead, knowing that a few very dangerous criminals were on the loose. It would have been best to have somebody quarantine the area while another party went in for the extraction. We didn't need any unnecessary deaths adding to the body count.

As I drove towards Shandra's house; I counted at least twenty L.Vs, cops, and National Guardsmen heading in the same direction. If these guys attacking Shandra were connected to Jessica's kidnappers, and if they were the ones that killed Jerry, there was no way they were going to survive. The law and those who enforce the law are 99% geared to take a woman's side. If a woman, especially a child is killed, there will be starving bloodhounds ready to rip you to shreds. If you killed a cop, demons with assault rifles will burst through your front door.

These bastards promoted themselves to the Devil himself, armed with his own pack of acid drooling hell hounds.

Two minutes is all it took for me to get to Shandra's house when the distance between there and Jerry's house usually brought up a twenty minute trip in heavy traffic. I paid no attention to the screaming souls as they were being fired upon. I paid no glance to the gutsy teenagers that tried to save the life of a mischievous friend. I paid not a single ear wave to the growling dogs and cats as they tried their best to defend their owners. The chaos had died down, but when I announced that an officer of the law was dead more chaos soon leaked into the streets. The people responsible were delusional, thinking that Jerry's killers were some sort of saviors from a military overrun. They were fools. They themselves allowed for petty excuses and tiffs to become all out wars, we were the ones trying to keep them safe. The people forced martial law upon themselves, just to give the military an excuse to clean up the world Old West style. If there was a problem, just shoot it.

I don't know why my mind filled itself with these thoughts. Perhaps it was its own way of justifying what was going on. The things I saw happen, to completely good and innocent people, were so awful the only conclusion I could come to is that in some unknown form, they had it coming. Isn't it funny how we all tend to think that way when something awful happens? Isn't it

weird that our first response to an awful event usually sounds along the lines of, "they didn't deserve this," or, "this isn't right?" We all know that the world is a messed up place, yet we just sit back and take what comes to us because even though we plead that that nothing was done to instigate it, yet deep within our hearts we actually do believe that we are solely responsible for the horrors we face. The most disturbing part of these events is that nothing was done in order to correct the horrors before they had a chance to begin.

It was too late to prevent Shandra from meeting harm, but it wasn't too late to keep her from dying. When I finally arrived at the house, a barricade was established using every vehicle that drove to the location. The engines were still running in most of them, but each one was completely empty of any presence. The drivers of the National Guard rigs were even missing. As I parked my car just outside the barricade and peaked inside the home, I knew exactly why everyone was gone. Shandra's house, a fortress that was only ever damaged from the inside was now decimated. Large holes were now on the sides of the building where severed body parts were thrown. Holes in every inch of the house where bullets flew both in and outward. Windows were shattered. Fresh, liquid blood covered nearly everything in sight.

As I got out of my car, I manifested the Ashtarian into two Tommy guns loaded with explosive rounds. With a gun in each hand, I hurried inside to inspect

the mess. Sure enough the further into the house you reached, the messier it became. Blood from at least twenty bodies, if not more, was so thick it managed to pool on carpet floors. It was impossible to step anywhere without having the blood soak into your shoes as if it was hiding for dear life. The severed body parts of everyone that managed to arrive before me were still slowly losing more blood, each source fresher than the last.

I walked through the house, trying my best to ignore the warm ooze that soaked into my shoes when several faint clicks caught my attention. Each click the whispered in my ear sounded as if someone was pressing their tongue against the roof of their mouth and pushed it forward. I looked around trying to find the source when soon a severed head that moved on its own caught my attention.

“Oh my god! Evans!” I whispered as I rushed to his side.

Evans did what he could to wiggle his ears to let me know that it was him. His body laid about five feet away from his head, yet he was still alive. I tried to say something, but any words that came to mind were too scared to let themselves known. I watched carefully as he moved his lips as if he was trying to say something. I was never good at reading lips, but from what I could tell, he was trying to tell me to run. Within a matter of seconds, the entire head stopped moving. The color of his skin and the look in his eyes seemed to drain



away. He was finally dead. My arms dropped with my weapons pointing towards the floor.

The human head can only last for a few moments after it is cut off. That fact alone was enough to make me realize that I had missed a brutal slaughter by a matter of seconds. Knowing that also allowed for a deep fear to grow within my heart. If I was seconds away from the deaths of these people... was it too late to save Shandra? Three large bangs and a panicking scream coming from the other side of the house gave me an answer.

I readied my weapons and stormed the hallway leading to Shandra's bedroom. Just in front of her door stood two assailants dressed in completely black attire, of course, painted in fresh streaks of blood, slamming their feet and fists against the door. How the door screamed in agony, indicated that Shandra managed to barricade it off. She was doing everything she could to put up a fight, and I honestly can say I could be any more proud to call her my fiancée. She was doing everything she could to survive, at least long enough for me to give her a hand.

"Get the fuck away from her!" I screamed.

Both assailants turned their heads to face me. Both of their faces were hidden behind black masks. Both growled like starving demons, in ways that sound like they were shouting demonic taunts in another language. I readied my weapons as they charged towards me and opened fire. The explosive rounds helped tear through their skin, killing them both on the spot. Their

flesh was pale and their blood was black. It wasn't hard to tell these guys were some form of demons. So it was probably best that tiny amounts of holy water were released with the explosive rounds made impact.

Both assailants went down without any extra fight. Their bodies emitted strong odors and heat that nearly singed the ends of every hair on my body as I stepped over them to get to Shandra's door. I could hear the sound of glass being tapped against as another demonic voice was taunting Shandra. She whispered something under her breath, almost as if she was in a trance. I knew enough to correctly assume that she was alive.

*'Shandra, can you hear me?'* I telepathically asked.

*'Dakota? Where are you?'* she asked.

*'I am just outside your door. When I get through, I need you to roll away from the window as fast as you can.'*

*'Okay, just hurry!'*

My heart started to beat even faster as I made the Ashtarian form into a single weapon, a double barreled Tommy gun. It still had the explosive rounds, but the punch of the bullets themselves doubled. This last bastard obviously was different from the first two. His methods of taunting Shandra were more human in nature rather than being beast-like. I wanted to give him extra special treatment.

Before I made my assault, my Shadow and Light Hunter's joined my side. Shadow had used his Ashtar-

ian to form a set of diamond edged claws around his fingers while Light had no weapons stocked at all.

"Looks like you can use our help," joked Shadow.

"Just shut up and help me get Shandra out of there!" I yelled.

Both of them instantly readied themselves for the final attack. There was no need for us to detail any sort of plan because it was already known among us. And as my sized eighteen foot slammed itself into Shandra's bedroom, finally breaking it open, we attacked. The hunters each burst through my chest as I made the first move by opening fire on the final assailant. As the bullets whistled through the air, impaling the glass window, Shandra rolled off her bed as ordered. Her entire body was being shielded by my Light hunter as he took the time to heal her wounds. I stood at the bedroom entrance, continuing to shoot the third assailant. The enemy was taking the barrage of bullets, acting as if each one was nothing more than stones beating against his body. Some of the bullets missed and struck a nearby house.

My Shadow Hunter flew through the flying bullets and the remainder of the window and sank his claws into the assailant's skin, quickly ripping him to shreds. Shandra's attacker screamed like a wounded wolf until Shadow took the time to slowly rip off his head, finally silencing him. Once the screams were gone, I dematerialized my Ashtarian and walked over to where my Light Hunter was kneeling over to protect Shandra. I

got down into the same position as my Light Hunter went back into my body just so I could check on my fiancé.

"I am glad to see that you are safe, my Cherry Blossom," I smiled.

Shandra's eyes slowly opened just so she could see me. Once she realized that it was, in fact, me that saved her life once again, she leaped forward and wrapped her arms around me.

"Dakota, I was so scared," she cried.

"I know, babe, I know," I whispered, "I came as fast as I could."

"Thank you! Can we just get out of here? I can't take much more of this!"

"Dakota, you may want to see this," warned my Shadow Hunter.

"Be there in a second," I told him. I took a moment to lean in and give Shandra a gentle kiss. "I am just glad that you are alive," I whispered to her before getting up to check on the body. I hurdled through the completely shattered window to stand next to my Shadow Hunter. He had ripped away the mask the final assailant was wearing just so we could find out who he was. I stared at the severed head in complete shock. I did know who this person was, simply because I knew his father. Shandra's assailant was John Ferri, Clemente Ferri's son!

Knowing who the assailant was, I manifested the Ashtarian into an old World War styled flame thrower

and burned the body. Something told me that John was going to try and make a comeback. If I burned the body, it would at least make things harder.

"You two better get out of here before the rest of the National Guard shows up, they are going to get a bit restless because of the radio silence," suggested my Shadow Hunter.

"You're right, it is only going to be a matter of seconds before this place is swarmed," I said.

I took out my radio and tried to listen in on the chatter, but the signal wasn't coming through. Occasionally a single word would come out clearly, but the frequencies were too jammed to do anything.

"Is everything okay?" Shandra asked.

"Yeah, it is just that something is jamming the radios," I answered, "We should probably get moving. Maybe we will move away from whatever is causing the interference."

Shandra stood as she tried her best to meet me by her window. Each step she took seemed shakier than the last, it was obvious she was still consumed by fear.

"Any ideas on what happened?" she asked.

"Probably some idiot took out the nearest tower, nothing much to really worry about," I said.

Despite everything that had happened, I somehow thought it was better to simply try to keep a positive spin on what was happening all around us. There was no need to start panicking more than usual, but to be honest I wouldn't be surprised if I was right. The radio

stations in town sometimes had a problem with the signal going out because of power issues, ironically most of which would happen around holidays people were likely drinking.

“Okay,” she whispered, “You're probably right.”

I walked over to Shandra, eventually meeting her in the middle of the room. We both took a moment to simply get lost in each other's eyes before hurrying out of the blood-painted home. We both rushed to my car, eager to drive away. As my foot pressed on the gas pedal and my hand adjusted the transmission, the signals on the radio started to clear up. The sounds of many soldiers screaming through the airwaves as they tried to dig up information about their dead comrades. Many of them were asking for me by name. I grabbed the microphone to my car radio and opened the line so I could finally give them the answers they were requesting.

“This is L.V Dakota Frandsen, I just departed from 4286 Madison Street. We need clean up units there soon to gather the dismembered bodies of at least twenty people, all L.Vs or officers, and the three bodies of the assailants responsible for the deaths of Officer Tracey Jerome and his family. From the looks of the scene, the twenty officers that responded to my radio transmission earlier, leading them to the same address, resulted in each one of them dying a brutal death. The severed head of L.V Terrance Evans was, however, still alive when I arrived on scene. Even though he

wasn't able to speak, it felt as if he was trying to warn me about the assailants before finally passing away. In response to the warnings and the deaths of my comrades, I single handily gunned down two of the assailants using explosive rounds, seemingly killing them both instantly. The third assailant was more resistant to the rounds, forcing me to resort to cutting his head off to finally get him to die. I have extracted the last living occupant of the house and I am taking her to a safe location. I am also announcing my retirement from the night. To everyone else that is remaining, good luck out there," I announced.

Immediately other soldiers and officers responded, and in the same instant I shut off both of my radios. Shandra needed me to be with her that night. And in truth, I needed to see her. Actually seeing the dismembered bodies in the daylight was something I could never forget. It took everything I could do in order to keep from breaking down, but it was all barely working. I just needed a couple hours with someone I could trust, just so I could let it all out. Shandra also felt this way, even though she was barely able to speak.

As we hurried home and locked ourselves in the house, the moment we were both waiting for overcame us both. Our arms became rocky mountains as they sealed us together. Waters sprouted from our eyes as we took the one chance we finally had to release all of our emotion. Every bit of fear, anger, agony, longing,

anything our minds held back came out of us. We had no control.

For a brief moment, our cries faded into silence and our bodies pulled away just enough so we could look into each other's eyes once more. Nothing stopped us as Shandra leaped upward and wrapped her legs around my waist. Nothing held us back as our lips dined upon each other's divine nectars and our clothes slowly came off. Nothing in the world as we made our way up the stairs and into our bedroom. The sheets comforted us as our skins became tangled together and our hearts synced to the same beat. That night we embraced each other, like never before, as we finally reached the point in our relationships the morons from school thought we had been doing all this time.

About an hour later, we both passed out as we enjoyed the warm aura that surrounded us both. It was a cold winter night to the outside world, yet to us, it felt like a warm paradise.

I don't exactly remember how long we slept before Shandra got up in the middle of the night. What I do remember is that the vibrations from her getting off of my bed jarred me awake just enough to be able to read the time on my digital clock. It was just shortly after midnight, at least from what I could tell. Shandra's bare skin glistened in the moonlight as she quickly slipped on nothing more than one of my old t-shirts and a black pair of panties.

"Hey you," I whispered, "Is everything okay?"



"Yeah, that was..." she smiled, "...amazing."

"It was. I know that we both agreed that we would wait until after we got out of school before we got that far, but I'm sorry that last night I couldn't control myself."

She stared at me with the most sincere look in her eye as she said, "You don't have to be sorry Dakota. I couldn't control myself either. It just felt nice that this time it was mutual."

"Hey," I whispered while sitting up behind her, "You know I would never do that to you."

The parts of Shandra that thought the person she would end up falling for would be just like her abusive still lingered within her. It was obvious that those thoughts have gotten weaker, which made her one of the lucky cases. What happened to her will always be inside her, and even pass on to our children and grandchildren. Since she was slowly overcoming the battle that was inside her, that was a definite sign of hope for what was to come.

"I know," she whispered, "Now go back to sleep, I am just going to get something to drink."

"Okay!" I said as I flopped back to my side of the bed.

I heard Shandra giggle as she walked out of our bedroom and downstairs into the kitchen. As she sorted through the cupboards, trying to pick out a glass, I turned to face my old alarm clock to check the time. My vision was initially a little blurry but as it cleared

up I could see that Shandra and I were only asleep for about two hours. The display on my alarm clock displayed both the date and time. In that particular moment, the display froze on "12/21/12 12:21.12." I lifted my head up to get a better look at the clock as the numbers on the display started to slide together, eventually forming the number 666 dead center of the display.

I kept shaking my head, hoping to shake myself from some messed up hallucination, but nothing would work. The same numbers were on the display every time I looked. Normally when those numbers appeared it would take a few weeks before the trouble began, but the screams of shattered glass and frightened women indicated otherwise.

"Dakota! It's them!" Shandra screamed.

I ripped the sheets from my body and slipped on some pants before running down the stairs to find out was going on. I don't ever remember my feet touching the ground as my eyes met Shandra held against the chest of a man who had been horribly burned. My fists clenched, ready to take on Shandra's attackers once again, but a bullet buried screamed as it buried itself into my skull.

"DAKOTA!" Shandra screamed as the demonic thugs took her away.

My entire body felt weak, I couldn't move anything. I was just conscious to sense Shandra's pain. They held a blade to her throat as they lead her into a large van.

Once she was inside, I could no longer sense her and my body could no longer cage my soul.

As my spirit moved on to the gates of heaven, I could hear voices in the distance. I remembered from my past visits, that heaven glowed bright blue. But this time, the air and clouds looked like gold. Rather than feelings of peace and harmony, there was brutality and intensity in the air. Grunting and shouting in the distance quickly became louder. I could make out the shadows of thousands in the distance rapidly moving around.

The sounds were soon drowned out by the screams of two large ravens. Each one flew down and perched itself onto the ground as a large older man dressed in Viking armor appeared. He had only one eye and wielded a long spear. I couldn't believe who I was seeing, I was in the presence of a god, known as "The All Father." Thor's father, Odin was greeting me within the realm of Asgard.

"You. Why am I here?" I asked.

He aimed the end of his spear towards my chest, quickly shooting a burning blue streak of lightning that sent me away. I remember being surrounded by a burning blue beam of light before finding myself in front of my old high school, now in ruins. Somehow Odin had found a way to make me appear just fifty feet away from what was the front entrance of the school. I didn't know why I was there until I heard a familiar voice scream for me in agony.

The building itself was entirely destroyed, almost appearing to have suffered some sort of explosion just moments before I had arrived. I looked down to my body to see that I was fully clothed, dressed in a black button-down shirt and black khakis. Covering my body was my large leather trench coat and my head was shielded by my black fedora. I was in my full uniform, without any memory of actually getting dressed. Too many thoughts flowed through my mind at once to focus on what was happening. As I was taking heavy fire from Suits stationed just outside the school, my mind finally pieced together the reason why I was still alive. I wasn't done fighting.

I took cover behind a large boulder that stood in front of the school and summoned the Ashtarian into a large machine gun and opened fire. As the bodies of the Suits fell, I continued my assault. The hallways once filled with mindless zombies known as the student body were now barren. I expected more Suits or some form of guards in the place. There had to be some reason why Odin himself sent me here. There had to be some grand or noble goal that I was supposed to achieve.

I walked through a straight hallway, making my steps as light as possible so they wouldn't make any noise. As I made my way towards the gyms, I heard the sounds of flesh beating against each other. I could hear bones being cracked and broken in after loud smacks rang in the distance. Muffled cries tried screaming for

help after each blow. The noise grew louder as I came closer to the gyms. How the sound danced through the halls made it nearly impossible to tell where the struggle came from. When I was just five feet away from the gym entrance, Jerry's severed head was thrown from the doors to my left.

"Dakota," taunted a voice, "Come on in!"

The bastard sounded almost like he was some sort of game show host. This is all some sort playtime to them. I changed the Ashtarian into the form of a large pistol and entered the gym. I fired seven shots into three demonic goons that stood around John Ferri as he had Shandra bound together and on her knees. Duct tape covered her mouth as it camouflaged her screams from the knife that rested on her neck as it took a few sips of her blood.

John's lips were sealed together from my flamethrower, so he couldn't have been the one who called for me. I looked around, noting every potential hiding spot that an unseen threat could emerge from. The gym was perhaps one of the most destroyed rooms in the school, with a large chunk of the walls and ceiling now missing. Anybody could hide anywhere within the debris and not be seen by anything.

"It has been a while, Dakota. Good to see that you and the Suits have gotten to know one another," the voice shouted.

"Why don't you come on out?" I asked, "So that we can become acquainted with one another."

Two shots fired from behind John and Shandra, striking me at the tips of my shoulders. Bits of my bones flew off of my body. Whoever took the shots was trying to clip my arms, but couldn't aim for shit in order to get the job done. A man walked up from behind John. He looked oddly familiar. His body looked frail and pale. Something in my gut told me that the man was involved in something dark.

"Cortez, you look like shit," I said to him.

"Nice to see you too, Mr. Frandsen," he replied.

John tightened his wrist as if he was getting ready to slit Shandra's throat open. I took the Ashtarian and fired three bullets in what was left of his head.

"Take it easy, Gunny, you and I both know Death is negligent to take us," Cortez laughed, "So why don't you set aside your space gun so we talk this out."

Setting my gun aside is probably the worst move that could be done in these types of situations, but I didn't have much choice. But I also knew that there was something Cortez wanted from me, and that was my bargaining chip.

"You know what, I will," I shouted, "But only if you get your brain dead goon there to get that knife away from my fiance's neck."

Cortez bobbed his head around as he pondered the idea. Eventually, his face showed that he agreed to the terms.

"Alright fine," he said.

I watched as he closed his eyes and mouthed an order. Cortez was always the type to lip sync to his own thoughts, so I knew that he was giving John to get the knife away from Shandra. However, John still held Shandra as a hostage. It wasn't an optimal situation, but it did give me a moment to de-escalate the situation. Once I guaranteed that there wasn't going to be some sort of trick, I dematerialized the Ashtarian just to level the playing field.

"I am surprised you actually followed through," Cortez shouted.

"I am a man of my word," I replied, "But since we are here, mind if I ask you something?"

"Go right ahead. I was actually waiting for you to start."

"Why? Why go after me and my friends? Why cause this chaos?"

"Unfortunately, son, what you're asking is a very broad and very complex topic."

"Then start with the kidnappings, since that is where you become the most relevant."

"Well, you're not wrong."

A gust of wind swept the ground between us as Cortez took a deep breath. He warned me that it was going to a long story, so he took a few moments to in order to prepare to tell it.

"Ever hear of a project known as 'SoulWeb' that started about a decade ago?" Cortez asked.

"I have heard the name before, but I am pretty sure we're not thinking of the same thing," I answered.

"Figures. Well, in short, the project initially was meant to study psychic phenomena. Some try to say that it was a knockoff of Project Stargate, with the only difference really being how the phenomena were studied."

"Go on."

"You see, Project Stargate was a test to find out how to use psychic powers. SoulWeb was actually meant to discover how such things were possible. The tests initially were meant to discover what happens to the mind, and even the physical environment, when psychic phenomenon is active. First, they tested events such as astral projection, prophetic dreams, telepathy, and even telekinesis and their results were amazing."

"What did they find?"

"Nothing that you and I don't already know. But they didn't stop there. They wanted to see if accounts of weather manipulation and spontaneous healing could also be tested, which is actually where you and your friends actually came in after a certain Ronald Ford gave the scientists running the tests all of the information."

Shandra's head jerked upward when she heard her father's name.

*'Dakota, what does he mean?'* Shandra asked telepathically.



Before I could answer, Cortez noticed that my eyes were linked to Shandra. Somehow he knew we were communicating, and that only made him giddy.

"Oh shit, I forgot! Shandra didn't know about that detail, I'm so sorry," he laughed.

He turned his head to face Shandra.

"Guess what, Shandra! Your father, and I mean your biological father, is alive. He has been working for a secret government agency, secretly sending funds to help take care of you and your mother," Cortez laughed, "And the best part? He and your fiancé have been working together since... a few months after you two got together if my memory serves correct!"

Cortez pulled out a pistol and shot John in the eye. As the body of his lifeless goon fell to the ground, Cortez walked behind Shandra and picked up the knife John dropped. As he grabbed Shandra and pressed the knife against the left side of Shandra's throat after throwing her to her knees.

*'Kill him, Dakota! Just do it,'* Shandra mentally screamed.

"Going back to SoulWeb, because of the information Ford gave the gentleman in charge, you and your friends were studied. You all even helped put this together, from summoning the demons to killing people that stood in the way of the plan. However more interest was placed in you considering how many times you have died and come back to life," Cortez said.

"GABRIEL!" shouted another male voice, "Let my daughter go!"

I looked around Cortez and Shandra to find out who was yelling. Ford was standing with about five human Suits just about thirty feet from us. Each one of them was aiming their pistols at Cortez, ready to take him out.

Cortez forced Shandra around just so she could get a look at her long lost father. When she finally saw him, the dams in her eyes burst open. She was finally seeing her father whom she thought was dead for almost a decade.

*'Dakota... is that...'* she whispered in her mind.

*'Yes, Shandra, that is your dad,'* I interrupted.

"Look, sweetie, there is your daddy," Cortez taunted.

Shandra tried jerking free from Cortez so she could be by her father's side, but she was held too tightly. There wasn't anything she could do in order to get away.

"Shandra, I know you are scared and probably very confused right now," Ford shouted, "But I just need you to stay calm for me, honey."

"Shandra, please listen to him. We kept this all a secret in order to protect you," I shouted, "Just keep fighting, my Cherry Blossom."

Something about what I triggered a spark in her eye. I could see the gears inside her mind turning, she was plotting her escape. Her father's face dropped as Shandra jerked her head backward and striking Cortez right

in the crotch. As she rose, a flicker of hope for her safety grew in my heart. She was going to make it.

"You stupid bitch," Cortez grunted as he stretched his arm out and slit her throat open, nearly taking Shandra's head completely off.

Ford screamed at the sight of his murdered daughter. My heart sank lower and lower as the pool of blood around Shandra's head grew larger and larger. I dropped to my knees, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I fought so hard to keep what was in front of me from happening.

"Hey cousin, fill them full of holes!" Cortez ordered.

One of the agents clicked his pistol, turned it towards the other agents, and open fire. Ford and the other five Suits were immediately killed.

"Let's hope your cunt fiance picked up a few tricks from you," Cortez snickered, "Too bad SoulWeb never figured out how you came back to life. Then again, maybe they already have in another universe."

A large bang sounded off in my mind. How fucking dare he talk about Shandra like that! My Shadow and Light Hunters felt the same anger as they appeared from nowhere and killed Cortez and his cousin. I crawled over to Shandra and rolled her lifeless body into my lap. My heart tried everything it could to revive her, even emitting a bright white light that healed her neck, but it was too late. The damage was too severe to save her.

I started bawling as I heard my grandfather's voice say that it was too late for her. My hand guided its way up the body I was cherishing just minutes before and gently closed her eyelids. All of the sudden, I noticed a familiar blue glow coming off of her engagement ring. I felt drawn to the glimmer as if a child-like voice was inviting me to come play. My hand grabbed the top of Shandra's and nested itself right next to the ring. A vision started to appear in my mind, one that the ring was put together.

I closed my eyes for a moment to allow the vision to manifest itself. When I opened them again, I was standing in a valley full of cherry blossoms standing behind a woman of average with a curvy body. She was wearing nothing more than my old shirt and a pair of black panties. Her arms were crossed as if she was waiting for something to happen.

"Hey you," I smiled.

She jumped and turned around to face me. Her face dropped in shock of seeing me, almost like she couldn't believe I was actually standing there.

"Dakota, is that really you?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm here."

She ran up to me like an excited little kid greeting a parent who had been away for a long time. When her body pounded against mine, I had to take a few steps back to keep from falling. My balance, however, soon restored itself once my lips were welcomed but the sweet nectar and soft touch of Shandra's kisses.

When she was finally done welcoming me, she dropped down in front of me with her hands pressed against my chest.

“Do you know where we are?” she asked, “This place feels like a dream.”

The cheers and giggles of a family at play emerged from behind Shandra. My eyes drifted from the top of her head to meet the eyes of the silhouettes in the distance. They were the same silhouettes from the dream-like

“Because this was a dream. One that I had shortly after we met,” I answered her, “Just turn around and look.”

Shandra turned away from me to face the happy family. The smile on her face grew in admiration of the sight. I rested my hand on her shoulder as I watched everything unfold. Every movement the happy family made matched exactly how I remembered it from the original dream. Mere moments passed before the silhouettes disappeared and a freshwater stream appeared right under our feet. We each wiggled our toes as we realize the clothes on our bodies suddenly changed. Shandra was dressed in a bright orange tank top with an even brighter flower pattern scattered all over and khaki shorts. I was now in a bright red t-shirt and jean shorts.

“What's going on?” Shandra asked.

Before I could answer her question, two tiny hands tugged on our shorts. We both looked down to find our daughter grinning from ear to ear.

"Mommy! Daddy! Come on let's play!" she squealed.

Shandra and I both accepted the invitation and joined Olivia in splashing and frolicking in the stream. We all splashed and swam and drank the water, creating the peaceful family image we all hoped for. The water was cold, but our hearts kept us warm. Nothing in the world could bother us. Soon Shandra and Olivia teamed up on me in order to push my large body into the water. As I fell backward, instead of water breaking my fall, my body was slammed against soft grass. The stream had disappeared and the clothes on me and Shandra both changed back to what they were before. Olivia had also disappeared, leaving behind only her tearful whimpers coming from all directions. Shandra and I both looked around, to find that the cherry blossoms were now barren, broken, and burnt. The grass underneath and all around us had turned black. It looked like we were in the epicenter of an explosion.

Shandra turned her head to let her eyes lock themselves into mine. A part of her knew what was happening, and what the space around us was trying to say. The beautiful images we created together were nothing. With each tear that fled from her eyes and beat against my cheek, pleading for help, I could tell there was still one question she needed to be answered.

"What is going to happen to Olivia?" she asked.

I slammed my head against the ground and burst into tears. I never thought of what would happen to our time-traveling daughter now that Shandra was dead, I didn't have much of a chance.

In life, people prepare to lose their grandparents. They prepare to lose their parents, maybe even their siblings. Even though it is a thought no genuine heart ever desires, people even prepare to lose their spouse. But under no condition, whether foreseen or not, does one prepare to lose their child. Olivia may not have been born yet, but she was very much alive to us. It wasn't until the dream of cherry blossoms that we even got somewhat of a chance to hold her. Now we were losing her. I was losing both of them.

As Olivia's whimpers faded away, something emerged in my mind. I wrapped my arms around Shandra and pressed her head against my chest. My heart caressed her cheek as I prepared for what I needed to say.

"I don't know," I answered, "But I do know, that this will not be the last time we see this place."

"How is that even going to be possible?" she asked.

"I don't know, but we will find a way. Even if I have to plant every single one of these trees by myself in order to do it."

Shandra wiggled her way up my body and free of my hug. She pressed her lips against mine, causing her entire body to emit a gorgeous golden light as wings sprouted from her back. I could barely see her face as

she whispered the words, "Thank you." I stayed lying on my back as I watched Shandra's spirit fly away.

Mere seconds passed as I watched her spin and twirl her way so her head would be pointed directly to the sky. Every move she made caused her body to grow brighter and brighter. As soon as she got so high, it looked like she could bust through the heavens themselves, her glow quickly disappeared. In the silence, I stood up and straightened my clothing as I stared at the very spot Shandra flew to. Soon my eyes were greeted by a large flash of light, brighter than the sun itself. The glow seemed to burn like the face of a raging warrior as it sent down two pulsating strikes of lightning that revealed my Shadow and Light Hunters in full uniform.

We all stood in a perfect triangle, hardly moved by the strong wind that manifested itself. All three of us reached our hands into the middle of the triangle, igniting a powerful energy that overtook all three of us, yet it did not harm us. together we spun like an engine that ran off the powers of the universe. Everything moved so fast, the ground under us was set on fire. The flames launched us into the sky. From the heavens, the three of us combined into one body, me. From below, I could see fires that formed the symbol for my team, the Paranormal Raider Force. The symbol quickly grew larger in size as I flew away. When I had flown far enough, a strong wind terminated the fires and ripped apart what



was left of the valley. However, soon it became obvious that it was no ordinary wind. It was a nuclear explosion.

The explosion in my vision was enough to jolt me back into reality. My eyes opened to find myself back at the school, with a dead Shandra lying in my lap. Somehow, during the vision, even more, the damage was inflicted to the entire area. There was another explosion, leaving only Shandra and me unharmed. The bodies of Cortez, Ford, and everyone were obliterated. Only their shadows remained painted against the ground they stood. Just by my vision alone had seemed that Shandra and I were alone. My ears had yet to return to normal, as they were ringing after having to leap from one blast in a dream world to the blast zone within reality. Somehow, rather than being a nuisance, the ringing brought me peace. I could simply have a few moments alone with Shandra to say my goodbyes.

I removed the tape from her mouth, only to find her lips in a surprising formation. Rather than being in anguish, agony, or sorrow, Shandra's lips and eyes showed that in her final moments she felt serenity. Her neck was also healed, but her body was too pale in for it to be inhabited by any soul. I leaned in and planted a kiss upon her forehead, while my tears took the time to frame her face. She was truly a beautiful girl, one that I was able to call my own. But now she is gone.

I placed both of my arms just underneath her body and gently slid her to the ground. As I stood up, I took the time to place her arms against her chest and closed

her eyelids. She didn't deserve to be lied out like road-kill. When I was finished with Shandra, my hearing was welcomed by the sounds clicking rifles. I looked around to find that the National Guardsmen I was helping were aiming their rifles at me, each one holding their index finger around the triggers. I slowly rose my hands up to surrender, just to let them know I wasn't going to fight. But I moved just a little too fast for comfort.

“OPEN FIRE!”

## Chapter 7

# The War Has Begun

My body was torn apart by a barrage of bullets. The way the rounds made my body move around so much it must've caused me to bump into Shandra. Once the soldiers stopped firing their weapons, I fell chest first into the ground. I used my remaining strength to place my palm inside Shandra's left hand. Her head was turned to the side with her eyes wide open, staring at me. The look of serenity from before had changed into one that looked more nurturing as if Shandra herself was trying to convince me to continue fighting.

As I lied on the ground, the soldiers started to surround mine and Shandra's bodies, thinking that we were both dead. Four men came together to carry me away from the scene, while two others took the time to make a bonfire from Shandra's body. I could tell that some sort of chatter was going on between the soldiers,

but I was too weak to understand anything. Soon my body to started to shut down completely. I had no clue if I was dead or alive.

My suspicions were cleared when I woke up inside a cell, much like the ones I saw the day Ford told me that he was Shandra's biological father. And much to my surprise, I was wearing a bright orange jumpsuit this time. But something was different about this particular place. The design was off, everything looked as if I was in a completely different facility. Moments after I was up, I was given an electric jolt by a large plastic cattle prod. I never left that cell for months, not even to use the restroom, while being exposed to several interrogations and tests. The questions they asked started out with were the typical questions on a hospital admittance form. At first, I answered everything to the best of my knowledge, until they started prying about my psychic episodes.

Each time I refused to answer or provided them with a nice big helping of "Fuck you," that is when the cattle prods started coming out of the woodwork. They kept pushing for me to answer, or at least use my abilities to retaliate. For some reason, my Hunters wouldn't come to try to help me escape and I couldn't bring out the Ashtarian to blast my way out. I tried several times, but the same results would come each time. Nothing.

I lost track of the days I spent in that cage. I will admit, the food tasted pretty good. But after four months of captivity, the scientists let me out. However, instead

of setting me free, I was moved to another facility. This one was equipped with a special simulation room, meant for training psychic super soldiers. However, I wasn't given the luxury of some high tech video game or some sort of virtual reality device. The simulations were comprised of very high tech and very detailed holograms. One of the machine operators was kind enough to explain that the visuals were meant to trick the mind into thinking it was injured, so in an actual battle scenario, it would take losing entire limbs before you would actually realize that you were hurt.

Needless to say, that fucking machine did as it was supposed to. The images it generated were so realistic, every time I was “shot” by the generated bogey I would actually feel the wound and see the blood coming out of me as I faced monsters and soldiers alike. I wanted to find a way to break apart the machine, but even my psychic abilities were confused. So I did everything I could to make it through the simulations and I don't even know how long the tests went.

Finally, some higher up decided that it was time for my “initiation.” Something told me that the person who made the call was one of the higher ups in the shadow government, and they were wanting me in their army. Long story short, the ones conspiracy theorists referred to as the “Illuminati” or “Big Brother” wanted my help in their plans to bring about the New World Order. Or perhaps the better name for them would be the one used by the Suits themselves, The Council.

Just to discuss the details of my recruitment, I was taken into a large room with five judges' podiums that each stood twenty feet tall. Five men each sat at each podium, their faces covered in shadow. I stood dead center of the room, in the middle of a dark red carpet with a large inverted pentagram printed across it, waiting for the five shadow men to speak. I could barely move from that spot thanks to the several tons of restraints that were placed on me.

"Dakota Frandsen. Age is sixteen years. Height is about six feet and six inches. Weight is about three hundred fifty pounds. Is noted on a federal watch list as a potential domestic terrorist under the terms of vigilante justice. Is noted to have potentially died and come back to life at least five times due to unknown factors. Also, has several connections to law enforcement, and through the help of our own Ronald Ford and Tracey Jerome, both now deceased, was able to commit acts of vigilante justice without any legal consequence. Engaged to a Shandra Ford, Ronald Ford's long-lost daughter, who is now deceased. You and Shandra both went to the same high school and started dating shortly after you let her stay at your place after a nasty domestic dispute at her home," ranted one of the Shadow Men.

"Throughout this series of events and more that my colleague didn't get to, you exhibited abilities well beyond the normal human capacity. Such abilities included; telekinesis, telepathy, teleportation, advanced

healing, energy manipulation, weather manipulation, psychic foresight, astral projection, episodes of feral rage, clairvoyance, and several others that don't even have labels. You have never labeled yourself as a psychic, only as someone who has a few tricks up his sleeve. Tie that to some of the physical skills you have exhibited is the reason why you are here," another added.

"So, what? Are you guys here to rant about me like some sort of legend or are you going to recruit me?" I asked them.

"That depends on you," shouted a third.

"Give me a few more details," I ordered.

"Normally, we would have you start out as a scout. But given your history, we decided to give you a high ranking position within the military. You will all of the troops, weapons, and supplies you would need to help us win this war," said the fourth.

"Your family and a few of your friends will be guaranteed shelter," added the first shadow man.

I clenched both of my fists, sending electric shocks through the restraints.

"Thanks to you fuckers, my family is dead!" I screamed.

"Wrong, we took them into custody," screamed the fifth.

"Do you think I am stupid, you fat pig?!" I screamed back, busting all of my restraints.

"Dakota, take it easy. Cortez was authorized to work on his own agenda. We had nothing to do with his actions," said the third shadow man.

Without any further word from me, both my Shadow and Light Hunters appeared to my sides with their Ashtarions in hand. Both of them had their weapons in the form of mini guns and had them pointed right at the five shadow men.

"Dakota, tell them to stand down!" shouted one of the Shadow Men.

"Fuck you," I said, manifesting an Ashtarion into my hands in the same forms as my alter egos.

All at once, my Hunters and I opened fire on the five shadow men. We watched as chunks of wood and streams of lead tore all five of them apart, killing each one instantly. Once we felt that the Illuminati Council had taken enough, we each turned to face each other.

"It is about time you bozos got here," I grunted.

"Don't you yell at us lover boy," shouted Shadow, "We were getting reinforcements to get you the hell out of here."

"Alright, so where were you?" I asked.

"Hell," answered Shadow.

"Valhalla," answered Light.

Rumblings on the outside of the building made us all nervous. The growls of beasts and the screams of direct energy weapons crawled against our bones, the battle was in full force.



"Let's just say, our world is not the only one at war," grunted Shadow Hunter, "Better get changed."

"Kinda hard to get changed into my uniform, since it was filled with more holes than heads in Congress," I said.

"Just focus on the Ashtarian," suggested Light Hunter.

As the rumblings grew louder, I utilized the Ashtarian to build a metallic uniform around my body that matched the ones worn by the Hunters. The metallic coating protected me from debris caused by three loud explosions. The explosives were rigged to bust holes through the council's walls. Through the smoke and ash, I could see that the attackers were humanoid in stature. Many of them resembled human, animal hybrids ranting about by conspiracy theories. Some were demons, others resembled angels.

"Are those the reinforcements?" I asked.

"Nope," both Hunters said.

"I guess we better get to work," I suggested.

The Hunters and I shifted our weapons into forms that were easier to carry. Light summoned two samurai swords. I grew two automatic shotguns from my hands. Shadow rose two copies of Thor's Hammer and shot lightning all around us. We stood our ground, waiting for the next move to be made. For only a few moments, the armies that surrounded us stood still as if they were evaluating whether or not we stood as a threat. The silence grew inside what remained of the walls. The only

sounds we could hear were our own beating hearts, and the cries of the wounded in the distances.

One of the creatures that breached the wall cried out, signaling to its comrades that it was time to attack. When their claws and swords started to reach for our flesh, that was when we knew it was time to retaliate and make our way outward. We had no plan, nor did we have an army to aid us. In the beginning, I only had two that stayed at my side throughout the fight. The war became so great, so chaotic, that no one could tell what was happening. There was only one way anyone could tell who their allies were, and that was to stick close to those who would be willing to plaster their own backs against yours. Everyone and everything else we saw was a potential enemy.

Each day that passed felt like a decade of bloodshed. Once I was finally freed from the prison, I did everything in my power to find my way home. I almost had no sense of direction because of the chaos, so I started moving in the direction I felt psychically drawn to. It took every inch of my strength and energy to keep from dying from the wounds I received from sneaky bullets to the claws of creatures from other worlds. During my travels, I took refuge in abandoned homes and buildings I knew would have some sort of food and medical supplies. However, some parts of me wonder if the places I took refuge in were a part of the world I was born in.

When the armies of both sides started to swarm the planet, a countless number of portals were revealed. For what we could tell, the portals actually lead to other worlds. It wasn't even much of a stretch to assume that the portals lead to different periods of time. I cannot tell how many times I have gone from fighting some demonic being, only to find myself taking shelter from swarms of arrows in ancient Greece. Somehow, at least to the best of my knowledge, I managed to find a way back to my home world as it was still in the midst of chaos.

Once I had spent about two months fighting, I finally managed to meet up with Ashtar Command. Ashtar, himself, provided me with knowledge about the war as he sent the goddess Athena, to rally up reinforcements for our army. At no surprise to me, the first bunch to respond were the Aesir, the gods of Asgard.

This war was not the cliché good versus evil, it was far from it. This war was one to dictate a new world order. It was one of few battles where angels sided with demons. The missing beings from the various realms had all united together and became the invaders responsible for many conflicts throughout history. The Pings that supposedly caused the violent behavior, were indeed special beacons meant to signal to the resisting forces outside of planet that humanity would once again need their help.

Many goals were set by the leaders of the various groups Ashtar helped organize, most of which included

finding ways to help those who weren't able to fight and to find some way to communicate with other people all over the globe. The main reason behind the war was that the leaders on both sides saw that the human race was in a very fragile state because it was on the verge of making an evolutionary leap. The armies gathered at Ashtar's side saw wanted to help humanity gather as one to lead a life of advancements that helped all in existence. Their ideals meant that as a whole, we were able to create a world where anything could be helpful to everything. A world where fancy gadgets and gizmos didn't come at the loss of beautiful scenery and wildlife. A world where everything was taken into consideration about how to improve the overall quality of life. A world where no knowledge was ever hidden away. A world that was prepared to take on anything that could damage the foundation of its creation.

The opposing army, ruled under a deity no one was able to identify, wanted to lead humanity into blind slavery and experimentation. They wanted humans to become nothing more than obedient lab rats who would pay no attention to what was really going on around them. A world where the darkness that tried to hide away people like me, Shandra, Jessica, Brianna, Marcus, Micasia, June, every sexually assaulted child, every beaten housewife, every bloody and bruised body, the Jane and John Does who mysteriously died, every drug addict, every alcoholic, every neglected ani-

mal and every other misfortune became several shades darker. A world like our own, but without the brave good Samaritans and without the various things to distract the unsuspecting public from the truth.

As each day passed my connections with the Ashtar Command and the Aesir allowed for those who joined my side in the battle to gain a greater understanding of how the portals work. We all tried to send the knowledge and documentation of the things we saw to other worlds, other universes, in hopes of changing the course of history. We knew that there was a chance other realities would manifest similar events, and we wanted to take the opportunity to allow for the inhabitants to get ideas based on the knowledge we gained on how to combat the struggles. If the worlds we managed to establish contact with didn't experience the same fates we did, it would at least give them ideas as to where they can find answers many spend their entire lives trying to find.

And to help find those answers for ourselves, and to document the events of the war the Ashtar Command and their allies helped establish several sanctuaries for people who were lucky enough to survive. Here is where many of us, including myself As the days went on, I grew tired of fighting and took the opportunity to watch over the sanctuary that was established out of what remained of Murtaugh.

I did everything I could to gather survivors and lead them to shelter in Murtaugh. By some twist of fate; I

was able to find June, Jessica, Marcus, and Micasia in the process. I tried everything I could to keep them safe. All of them even took whatever weapons they could find in order to stand their ground. But out of the surviving members of the Paranormal Raider Force, only Jessica and I managed to make it to the sanctuary. It has seemed that only those capable of channeling the strength of the demons they fought in their lives were the ones who were able to survive the longest. That and in the final push for the sanctuary, we were helped by a legion of Valkyries who took the time to slaughter our opponents.

Jessica and I took shelter in my grandparent's house, which somehow seemed unaffected by the war. My family was gone, and a majority of their belongings were gone as well. Part of me hoped that in some way, they were able to find shelter of their own. But as each day passed, in every moment that I was somehow able to squeeze in a thought that had nothing to do with the battle, I have come to accept the possibility that they have all passed away.

And now, on this surprisingly calm Sunday, I have the chance to let the world hear my thoughts. Not just our world, but every world that was part of the battle. I am still sorting through everything that happened, just trying to find out what happened. The world was still too chaotic to find out the names of the enemy. Plus it was only a matter of days before the winter came around and it nearly freezes everything in sight. Un-

seen forces had been governing the actions of many who were involved in the war, but the winter proved to be one of the biggest tests.

Today's date is October 26, 2014, and I am finally able to finish writing this book. If you have taken the time to read the contents of these pages, I urge you to please be on the lookout for similar books that detail what happened. There is a good chance that the writers may know something about the war that I am completely unaware of. As I am writing these last few words, Jessica is by my side helping me keep focus simply because I am finally able to finish what I had to say. This book took me a lot of time to write, mostly because the story itself is still happening. In fact, I hear the cries of the Valkyries just above the roof of my grandparent's house, signaling that they are about to strike. There is a good chance that I may be needed for this fight, so I am going to leave the rest to Jessica.

Umm... hi. My name is Jessica Summers, Dakota just asked me to finish up this book so he could check out what was going on with the screaming outside. I was given the orders to write down everything that is going on just in case it has something to do with what Dakota has already talked about.

I am just taking a peek outside, we were both sitting by the kitchen cabinet when we heard the screaming come from the sky. In the middle of the yard, there

is some sort of angel standing with a golden sword in hand. This angel doesn't look anything like what is shown in old paintings. It was dressed in golden armor and the wings even glowed. I tried to get a look into its eyes. I keep getting the feeling that I recognize the angel. I can't put a name to it, especially because I didn't know anyone with the long gorgeous red hair the angel had.

Dakota is standing about four feet away from the being, and the look on his face shows that he is in shock. I wonder if... oh my god. The angel-thing just took off her mask! I know why I recognized it. The angel is SHANDRA!

I can see tears on Dakota's face, but I can't hear what he is saying to her. He is slowly walking closer to Shandra, reaching his arms out like he is trying to give her a hug.

Oh no, this can't be happening. How is this possible?! I thought she...

SHANDRA JUST STABBED DAKOTA WITH HER SWORD!



